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JACK'S COURTSCHIP:

*A SAILOR'S YARN OF LOVE AND
SHIPWRECK.*

BY

W. CLARK RUSSELL,

AUTHOR OF "THE 'LADY MAUD,'" "A SEA QUEEN," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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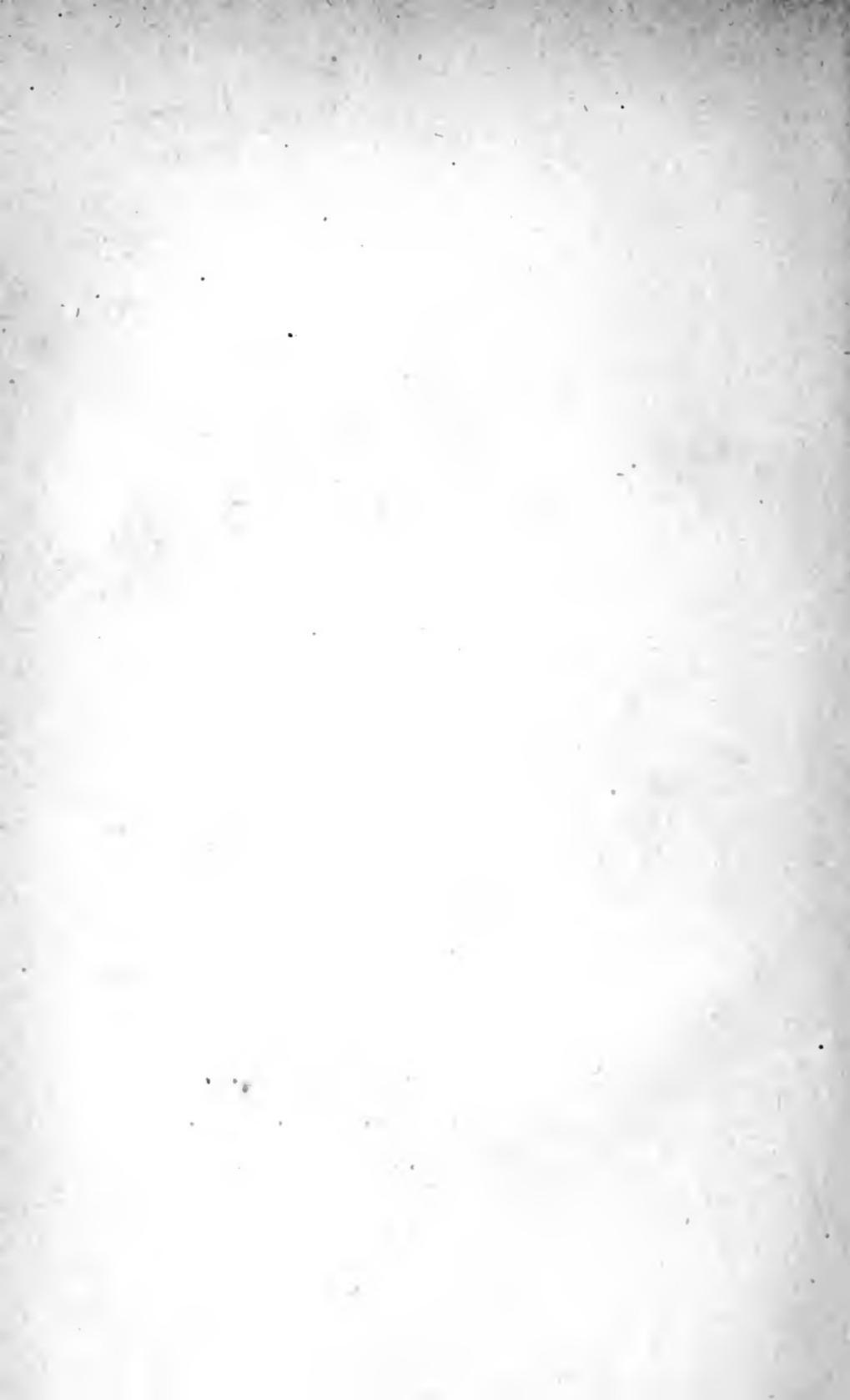
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JACK'S COURTSHIP.

CHAPTER I.

A SHORT PREFACE.

SHIPMATE, have you ever seen such a sight as a dog chasing his tail on a hearthrug or in the sun, in pursuit of a comfortable posture? Just in that manner have I rotated over this story. Over and over again in my mind have I been turning it, trying to find out how it ought to be told. It is as queer a yarn, in my opinion, as any man ever had to relate; and an artist, I have no doubt, would make a first-rate job of it. But I, who had all that I learnt at school washed out of me at sea, where the Latin grammar, the Greek alphabet, and the like, were jettisoned to make way for a very different sort of intellectual cargo—I say, how should I be expected to know anything about art?

After many mental revolutions I have arrived

at this determination—to make a kind of log of it, and to spin the whole yarn as though a company of sailors were sitting round me, pipes in hand, and I was talking to them. The story will go to windward better in that form than in any other; and as a log-book is the last sort of volume you would look into for elevated writing, and as the mariner's lingo has never been famous for polish and sweetness, so my choice comforts me with the reflection that it will save me the pains of reading through the poets for elegant ideas, and wading through the dictionary for fine words.

My name is Jack Seymour, and in such-and-such a year I was five-and-twenty years old. Were yarns of this kind embellished with cuts I might save myself a troublesome spell of description by handing the printers a portrait of myself as I was in those days. Five feet ten inches my height was, and though I had knocked off the sea, after seven and a half years of it, in eighteen hundred and something odd, old ocean had left such an impress on me that I looked as much a sailor after three years of shore-going life as ever I did in the jumper of an apprentice riding down a topgallant stay, or in the blue serge or pilot-cloth of a second mate, stumping the weather-side of the quarter-deck.

It takes a sailor a long time to straighten his

spine and get quit of the bold sheer that earns him the name of shell-back. That is not all. Lobsouse eats into the system ; salt-horse works out of the pores and contributes to that complexion of mahogany which is often mistakenly attributed to rum and weather ; and I have been shipmates with a man who grew white-haired at thirty on soup and bully.

Why will mammas let their little boys go to sea ? It is not only that it is the hardest life in the world ; when once you are a sailor you are always a sailor, and the calling sticks to you as the rings and bracelets do which are pricked upon your wrists and fingers ; so that should you ever happen to fall in love with a girl who does not much care about sailors, but who likes soldiers, and could like you were you a soldier, you are forced in spite of yourself to go on looking like a sailor, though you may have quitted the sea for years, and would enlist to-morrow if the beauty commanded you to do so.

I ceased to be a nautical man when my father died. I was then second mate of the vessel in which I took my last voyage, with a chief mate's certificate, and had little doubt of obtaining a chief mate's berth next time. But on my arrival in London from China, after a voyage that had carried me round the world twice, I learnt that my poor father was dead, and had left me all he

had, barring his furniture, which he had willed to some relative who lived in the north of England, though I had never heard of her before, and do not even now know in what manner she was connected with my father.

He died a comparatively poor man, owing to his living up to his earnings as a solicitor ; and all that I stepped into was two hundred and fifty pounds a year—or thereabouts ; between ourselves, I may say it was a few pounds short of that figure. But it was an estate to me who was absolutely alone in the world, being an only child, and my mother having died many years before this story starts. At all events, I reckoned the income —the capital was well invested—large enough to justify me in leaving my profession overboard and setting up for myself as a gentleman ashore.

Accordingly I hired a furnished bedroom and sitting-room in the West End of London, paid a small subscription, and became member of a little club, which brought me acquainted with a number of very good fellows, so that I had companions enough. And for a year or two this sort of life suited me very well. It was an immense escape from the old servitude of the sea ; I was my own master, could do what I pleased, go where I liked, was responsible to no man ; and I was never tired of thinking of my liberty and enjoying it.

But I am bound to say that, as time crept on, I began to consider that I had no business to be loafing about the West End of London. There was enough money, perhaps, in two hundred and fifty pounds a year—to give the income a square sound—to enable me to take life on the condition of dining for three-and-sixpence, of cheapening the obligation of smoking by a judicious admixture of pipes with cigars, of attending a play or an opera when a ticket for it was given me, and even going to a dance, at long intervals, at some houses which were very hospitably open to me.

But when two years of this easy, idle life had passed, reflections would steal in. I began to think my income small, and that I should find it smaller as I grew older; for though a youngster possessed of two hundred and fifty pounds a year may be thought pretty well off, an old or middle-aged man cuts but a poor figure on that sum. No thoughts of marriage had ever entered my head; not only because I liked being lord of myself, which I certainly found no great heritage of woe (possibly because I never underwent the labour of putting my hair in curl-papers), but because I had never met with any girl I could fall in love with.

And here let me say that I cannot recall this period of my life without a disposition to drop on my knees and give thanks for my salvation from the fate that too often befalls idle young men on

small incomes in London and other parts. For I protest that nothing stood between me and a dark destiny in the shape of a ballet-girl or a barmaid, but a tolerable stock of good sense and a natural aversion from anything vulgar or commonplace in woman. What hand was there to save me had I chosen to lounge about bars and suck the nob of my stick in dreary intimate confab with the curls, and rouge, and wadding of the restaurant or the public-house? I don't mean to say that barmaids and ballet-girls, and the like, do not make good wives. I have no doubt they try their best; but what can they do with their vulgarity? How are they to deal with a certain letter which *will* recur in conversation like a circumstance over which they have no control? I am thankful for being saved from marrying a lady of this pattern, because I can conceive of no domestic condition more truly frightful than that of having a wife of which one is ashamed, whose conversation in company causes all hands acute suffering, and who is one of the reasons why one's friends pity and despise one. I once sat near a knight, who was also a member of parliament, at a table full of ladies and gentlemen. The knight's wife sat over against us; she had a kind face, but was a most illiterate woman, yet had been a good match for the knight when he developed from an errand-boy into a porter. He had made his

fortune, had educated himself, was a great man and a fine man, with a strong voice and an imposing bow; he was an Irishman, and spoke of "me colleague the mimber for Ballywhack;" and opposite sat his wife, on whom he had to keep scowling to remind her that she was there on the condition that she did not spake. Who would be in such a position as that Irish knight was? Fancy having to dragon a wife, not for her morals, but lest she should open her mouth and say 'ouse for house, and so forth! Hence, when I think of my life in London after I gave up the sea down to the time when this yarn properly opens, when I consider the several opportunities afforded me of giving my name to a fifth-rate actress, a music-hall singer, a stout, pale, and golden beauty who drew beer behind a luncheon-bar, and two or three others whose vocations I cannot just now recollect, I declare I am ready to prostrate myself with gratitude over my escape.

Well, I will say no more about this, and belay any further reference to my growing sensitiveness on the subject of idleness, and the enlarging conviction that if ever I was to end as a man qualified to enjoy life without perpetually overhauling his purse to see if there were a few shillings in it to spare, I must turn to and discover some method of getting money whilst I was young and my health and spirits good. Enough for the purpose of

these loggings if I say that in the summer of the year 18—I found myself at Clifton, near Bristol, the guest of an uncle, of whose existence I had indeed heard, though I had never before set eyes on him, and my meeting with whom was so odd and unexpected that I am bound to tell you the story of it.

CHAPTER II.

MY UNCLE SEYMOUR.

I WAS standing at the window of my lodgings, near Regent Street, smoking a cigar and watching the people pass. It was a very hot day; not a dog trotted by but had half a fathom of tongue hanging from its jaws; and the heat gave an edge to the peculiar smell of flue and ancient cookery that haunts the atmosphere of every London lodging-house. In short, it was just a day to set a man dreaming of the country, of shady nooks under cool trees crowded with twinkling leaves, bees making a homelike music in the sunshine beyond, and a smell of wildflowers around; or, better still, of the sea-shore, the lip, lipping, and fountain-like seething of the tide on the brown sand, a mild breeze, warm as a woman's breath, blowing across the azure water with enough of strength in it to keep the pools among the rocks trembling.

Nothing could be pleasanter than such thoughts, and whilst I stood turning them over and resolving in a mechanical sort of way to up keeleg and make

a stretch for the coast—no matter where—there comes a cab along the street, stops under my window, and presently a servant bundles into the room to tell me that a gentleman wishes to see Mr. Seymour.

He was close behind the girl, and before I could ask his name she stepped aside and he walked in. He looked at me very hard, and said, “Is your name John Sutherland Seymour?”

I bowed.

“Son of Thomas Sutherland Seymour, solicitor of ——,” naming the address.

I bowed again, wondering who he was and what his business could be. He was about fifty-five years old—perhaps more—had a strong, reddish beard, heavy eyebrows, and small merry blue eyes. He had spoken my name with a slight Yankee drawl in his voice, but his appearance was that of an Australian—to my fancy at least; perhaps because when I was in Australia I had seen men go dressed as he was, in blue check shirt and collar, blue serge trowsers, white waistcoat, cloth coat, square-toed boots, and a large, soft, flapping wideawake.

“John Sutherland Seymour—probably Jack Seymour?” he repeated; and I said, “Yes, sir; Jack Seymour, that's my name.”

“Seymour is my name too,” said he. “Can't you guess who I am?”

I stared, trying to think.

"Have I been all my life carrying the family nose about to no purpose?" he cried. "What is the use of the genuine Roman run, the Seymour rise—what sailors would call the kink amidships—if it fails to convict me as a relation?" And so saying he struck an attitude in profile with his forefinger against his nose.

"Is it possible that you are my uncle, Charles Seymour?" I exclaimed.

"More than possible if you are Tom Seymour's son?" he answered; and coming up to me he grasped me by the hand, nearly shook my arm off, and then, pitching his hat and stick on to a sofa, plumped himself into a chair.

I welcomed him with as much heartiness as surprise would let me put into my manner, endeavouring meanwhile to recollect what I had heard about him from my father; how in his youth he had been packed off to sea as a scapegrace; how he had run away from his ship in some China port, and was heard of five years later as doing pretty well in New York; how, very much later yet, news of him reached my father from Canada through a gentleman who reported that he was making money fast. He had never written, and had been as dead to his family as if he had fallen overboard and gone to the bottom on his first voyage.

After a long and very narrow inspection of me, he said, " You are not like your dad, Jack!"

" No," said I, amused to hear him call me Jack.

" D'ye see any family likeness in me?" he asked.

" More than enough to swear by," I answered.

He ran his eye over the room, turning his head about so as to command a round view, and coming back to me asked if I was married.

" No," said I laughing, for there is something in this question that will make a single man laugh.

" I might guess so. There are no female hints here, and that pipe," says he, nodding towards the mantelpiece, " carries, I calculate, at least six smokes too much in the bowl of it ever to be in the family line. Where does your father live?"

" He is dead," I replied.

" Dead!" he exclaimed. " Dead, d'ye say?" he bent his eyes on the ground and tapped with his foot. " How long has he been dead?"

I told him. He continued looking at the floor with a very grieved and disappointed expression in his face, and then, returning to his first manner, said, " I hope he died pretty well off?"

" Why, yes," said I. " Pretty well off, but not better than pretty well."

" Is your mother living?"

" No."

" So you're alone?"

I nodded. He took another look round the

room, and said, " You have all that my brother Tom left, I presume ? "

" Pretty nearly all," I answered, tickled by his Yankee curiosity, though he asked his questions with [so much good nature and sympathy in his voice and manner that it was impossible to resent them.

" What might that be, sir ? "

" A trifle short of two hundred and fifty pounds a year."

" Ah ! " he exclaimed, pulling a chair to him, and resting one leg upon it. " Time was when I reckoned Tom would beat me. He had ten times my brains and fifty times my ballast. He would be going to windward with his spars erect and his spanker-boom amidships when I was on my beam ends, points off my course, and sagging like a billyboy to leeward. You'll excuse my nautical similes, nephew. They are not always intelligible, but I am fond of going to the ocean for my ideas."

" Head as you please in that way," said I, laughing. " You'll find me close in your wake."

" Oh, then you understand something about the sea, do ye ? " says he.

" As much as seven and a half years of sailorising could teach me."

" Damme ! " he burst out, " if I didn't think so right away off when I first looked at you. But

you're not at sea now—you're no longer a sailor, are you?"

"No. I gave up that life when my father died. What man worth five pounds a week would keep at sea as a sailor?"

"Ay, abuse it! abuse it, my lad," he shouted. "I'm your man to follow every syllable with breathless enjoyment. Oh for the privilege of spread-eagling the rogues who write books about the nautical life, and make it appear a pleasant calling. Have they dwelt with the sailor in his forecastle? have they ever spent two hours in passing a lee-earing, as flexible as a bar of iron, in a gale of wind full of ice and the water washing as high as the lee coamings of the main-hatch? can they show figure-heads mutilated like ours by weather that ranges from the roasting calms of the equator to the hissing snow-whirls and shrieking hurricanes of the Horn?"

He pulled a handful of cigars out of his side pocket, put one into his mouth, and handed the others to me.

"Mind," he continued, flourishing his cigar, lowering his voice, knitting his shaggy brows and speaking with tragic solemnity, "I do not mean that the wonderful, ay, Jack, the thrilling magic of the ocean that drew me as a boy——"

"I always understood you were sent there," I interrupted.

—“to its moaning, storm-laden heart,” he continued, slightly cocking his right eye at me, but taking no further notice of my remark, “has vanished from my sympathy and love. Davy forbid! Man! I never hear the sullen thunder of breakers upon the shore, I never look forth upon the mighty grey or violet or silvery blue shadow that leans its sweeping line against the haze of the distant heaven, I never watch the majestic procession of its towering combers rolling into snow as they run roaring after one another in the wake of the rushing and living storm, without a leaping up of the spirit—an intoxicating sense of being about six years old—a feeling, I will say, of triumphant gladness, as though in the mere presence and voice of the glorious ocean there was something to deepen and sweeten life at its inmost sources, and to purify and ennable the spiritual part of me, and of you, and of every other living human creature whose forehead does not slope into idiocy, with inspirations which come very near to being revelations.”

He watched me with an amused face, as if he should say, “Come, my young relative, did you think I could only talk slang through my nose? What d’ye say to this as a sample of my parts?”

“How long have you been in England?” I asked, hardly knowing what to make of this singular and certainly striking compound that was

sitting and smoking before me, and calling itself my uncle.

"Near upon eighteen months."

"And when do you return?"

"Return!—where?"

"Where you come from," said I.

"When I die," he answered. "I'm here for the remainder of my natural life, and let me hope that your British customs will let it keep natural. Yes, siree, I'm here to fix. I have a house at Clifton, near Bristol, close to the Gorge—d'ye know the Gorge?—something to save one many a journey out of this shallow little kingdom, as I never look down into it without reckoning myself abroad in a nation of real scenery. In my house, Jack, you'll find an aunt and two cousins, who'll be heartily glad to make the acquaintance of so fine and manly a beauty as you, and who'll like you none the worse for knowing what the smell of tar resembles."

I thanked him.

"When can you come?"

"Will next Monday do?" said I.

"To-day will do better. There is a fast train at six. We can meet at Paddington and travel together. How long d'ye need to pack up your silver buckles and pomatum?"

Now, that 'day would have suited me as well as any other. I had nothing to do, and was eager to get out of the sickening, sweltering atmosphere of

London. But my dignity was worth something too. It would not do to jump too eagerly into the arms of this uncle and his family. Let them talk of me a little, thought I, before I heave in view, that I may get some kind of importance out of their curiosity. So I said I should not be able to leave London before Monday, on which my uncle answered, "All right. Suit yourself. We'll look out for you on Monday," and gave me his address on a card.

I inquired how he had managed to find out where I lived.

"I'll tell you," said he; and he began a long story of how some months ago he took a directory and hunted through it for my father's address; how he noticed that there were three Thomas Seymours (without the Sutherland), on whom he called, but found none of them the man he wanted; how he worked his way down through older directories until he came across Thomas Sutherland Seymour, solicitor, such and such a street.

"This," said he, "I reckoned to be my brother; but when I called at the office the clerks they treated me as if I had come to make fools of them. They knew nothing of Thomas Sutherland Seymour. To cut this yarn short, time passed, and I came to the conclusion that if my brother was alive it was not the will of Heaven that I should find him. My wife said, 'It serves you right. You never wrote

to him, and now that you are anxious to see a family face again, fate steps in, takes a hitch over a belaying-pin with the hauling part of your wishes, and stops the tackle from travelling.' Those," continued he, after a little pause, during which time he had slyly watched the face of astonishment I had put on on hearing that I had an aunt who could talk in that fashion, "were not exactly her words, but that is no doubt what she meant. Well, yesterday I came up from Bristol, and in the railway carriage met a young man, and got into talk with him. One thing led to another. I spoke of my brother, of the bigness of the world when you want to discover a man, and its littleness when you don't want a man to discover you. 'What's your brother's name?' asked the young gentleman. I told him. 'What was he?' said he. 'A solicitor,' says I. 'Well,' said he, 'I know a young fellow named John Sutherland Seymour, and think I have heard him say his father was a lawyer. I don't know his private address, but he belongs to a club I am member of, and if you care to call I have no doubt the porter will be able to tell you where he lives.' That's how I found you out, sir."

"Stranger things have happened than that," said I, "and yet it is extraordinary enough that you should have met with a man able to cast off the hauling part of your wishes, and so prove himself stronger than fate."

"Similes of that kind recall your old life, hey, Jack? Is that why you drag up the words again and fondle 'em?" He came to the window for air, and said, "Are you in business? Do you do anything? Are you getting money in any fashion?"

"No," I replied; "I am an idle man, and I'm trying to find out whether I ought to be ashamed of being idle. I'm afraid the sea has unfitted me for business. I am in hope of cultivating some promptings in that direction, though upon my honour I doubt if I have a single quality that would be of the least use to me in any shore-going capacity."

"That's very likely," said my uncle. "But what do you want with business? Haven't you enough to live on?"

"Why, perhaps I have. But don't you see," said I, slightly warmed by observing that he had not helped me in the smallest degree in my apology for doing nothing and being nothing, "that I want to excuse myself for my idleness, which should satisfy you that I do not think idleness good?"

"What made you give up the sea?" he asked, laughing behind his beard.

"Didn't I explain, sir? I said it was having an income left me. Nor was that all. You have been to sea, and know what the life is. Who would be a slave? Yet I was when at sea, as all sailors are—running here and there to other people's orders,

pulling and hauling, furling, reefing, and greasing, choked with doughboys and hishee-hashee, snatching at sleep and catching a wink as a man on a yard-arm might try to grasp a booby, and managing to come off with a feather out of the fowl's tail."

"Ay," cried my uncle, grinning extravagantly, "and let us hear what shape the slush-pot has, and how the head-pump is rigged, and how a man feels who is one of a short-handed crew when all hands are called! Oh, the happiness of passing a week with the galley-fire washed out, nothing but frost and sleet and wind on deck, and water and darkness and streaming togs below, weevils in the bread-barge, rats in the mess-kids, and the scuttle-butt smelling as sweet as the Thames off the Isle of Dogs; a temperance ship where all the lush is aft; a shoddy ship whose owners fall distracted and tear their hair and gnash their teeth every time the old sieve is reported still afloat and in league with the underwriters."

Then, looking at me very gravely, "Pray, young man," says he, "where did you get your gab from? Not from my brother Tom?"

"I must have got it from you," I replied; "it is evidently in the family."

"Well," says he, "all that I can say is, a young fellow who can talk as you do ought to find life larger than the West End of London. How do you pass your days?"

"I knock about," I answered, laughing heartily, for there was something so funny in his manner that it was like talking to a comedian.

"Why don't you get married? If I were your age and had all the world before me, I'd view marriage as an industry, and start in business as a husband. Make no mistake, Jack. There are some decent pickings to be found in that calling." He saved me from replying by pulling out his watch and exclaiming, "I have an appointment at four. I'm sorry you can't manage to meet me at Paddington. But we shall see you on Monday?"

"Without fail, sir, all being well."

He laid hold of my hand, and viewing me earnestly said, with a singular kindness and gravity of voice and manner, "Jack, I'm glad to have found you—glad to have met my brother's laddie. Old memories rise whilst I talk and see you standing up in front of me, a big man. Think of Tom having been dead three years! It makes me feel as if a century had passed since I was a boy. I ought to have written to him—I ought to have made myself heard of—there's much I should have done. But see here, Jack. God's peace be with him! d'ye know it was he who would chime in with your grandfather against me; tell the old man that the sea was the only fit place for such a rascal as I—for such a skylarking

son of a gun who was always kissing the servant girls, running into debt with landlords, and coming home with dancing eyes and light heels at one o'clock in the morning? He was right, and the old man was right; but I'll tell you a big truth, Jack. It's possible for folks to be right and to be wrong too. Man alive! I was not a rascal, but a loose human arrangement with the makings of a fellow-creature in me; an unravelled rope whose strands wanted twisting up and whose end wanted *whipping*; and when I came to be a man, got a bit of money, married and passed into what ye might call a municipal entity—a thing interested in rates, drainage, and fellow-townsman—the bile would rise in my gorge when I thought of Thomas and home, and I never could bring myself to hold out my hand in a letter. It was a traditional prejudice, but I left it t'other side the water when I sailed with the wife and the girls for the old country. Another day you shall tell me where my brother rests. Meanwhile, God bless ye, and—and don't fail us on Monday next."

So saying he pulled on his wideawake, grasped his stick, and scuttled out of the room, trotting downstairs so nimbly as to defy my efforts to pass him in order to be first with the hall door.

CHAPTER III.

I GO TO CLIFTON.

THIS conversation with my uncle took place before my story properly opens, and if I were an artist, perhaps I should leave it out for that reason ; but apart from its being as good as a joke, and showing besides how it happened that I went on a visit to Clifton, it enables me to tell you in a pleasing manner a good deal about myself, and likewise it explains who my uncle was, and why he was a stranger to me.

You may talk as you please about the beauty of foreign parts. I've seen some grand shows in that way in my time, as what sailor has not ? But had I never viewed anything finer than Clifton—that part of it, I mean, which they call the Gorge—I should still be able to boast of having beheld as lovely a bit of nature as any part of the world has to offer. What fixes it in my memory was the sunset. I had tumbled into an open fly—quite a genteel turn-out—along with my

portmanteau, and when we had climbed a steep hill and had got on top of it and rolled along some distance, I stood up and saw a sky full of the magnificence of a score of glorious colours, against which the heavy foliage and green heights which tower above the valley, in whose heart the silver Avon (at flood-tide, mind you) winds like a stream of mercury, stood out dark, massive, dense, the gold of the sky trembling among the fibrine fringe of the wooded acclivities; and layers or folds of emerald, sapphire, rose, scarlet like incandescent iron, sunbright effulgence like that of molten steel in a retort swept by the hurricane of a steam-created blast, stretching their most beautiful lengths along until their extremities faded in the black vapour of a huge cloud, from whose sooty, stooping belly green sparks of lightning were crackling and glittering, whilst the thunder moaned like the voice of a lion heard roaring in pain in some distant resonant forest.

The house abreast of which the driver hove his horse to was a small mansion, with about an acre of ground in front of it full of flowers, high trees, a fountain, and so forth. A man-servant in a black suit and white necktie opened the door, and I marched in, but was scarcely entered when my uncle, rushing along, received me with a shout of welcome, and dragged me, travel-stained as I

was, into a large and exceedingly elegant drawing-room.

There were four ladies there, one middle-aged, the others young, one of these a caller, as I supposed, with a small, fat, very old dog, sleek as a rat, at her feet. This tottering creature bared its teeth as we entered, and delivered a few strange wheezy notes, on which the young lady cried "Down, you silly dog! hush, you foolish old Flora!" and in the midst of this my uncle introduced me.

The middle-aged lady was my aunt, a tall woman, still handsome, with plenty of black hair, dark eyes, a fine figure, and wearing what women call "a train," so long that the end of it remained at her chair after she had risen and advanced some paces to meet and welcome me. Two of the others were my cousins, both of them plump, fair girls, not pretty, but with very kind faces and pleasant smiles. I liked their manners amazingly—I mean I heartily relished the way in which they received me; no affectation, no hanging back, no smirking, and yet there was a pretty modesty in their air, too.

But the third young lady! My uncle on introducing me to her had called her Miss Hawke, and I learnt what her Christian name was by one of my cousins saying, "Don't mind her, Florence dear," when her dog barked, and she rebuked the infirm old beast. Florence Hawke, then, was her

name, and when you get deeper into this book—which you are bound to do, for a stranger yarn you never read in your life—you'll understand why I have it so pat and am able to write it down without scratching the back of my head and looking aloft for the words.

How am I to describe her? Mates, on the honour of a gentleman who would not tell a lie to gratify the conceit of the finest woman living, I swear that in my opinion Florence Hawke was the sweetest little creature at that or any other time to be found in this country. And why do I call her little? Faith, she was not so little either. When we stood side by side the top of her sunny aromatic head was on a level with my ear. But little, somehow, is the adjective that will come shoving into my thoughts when I speak of her, because, perhaps, of the winning simplicity of her manner, the childlike earnestness of her, her pretty delightful ways, which had a certain charming babyishness about them.

I say, how am I to describe her? If all the colours the very royallest academician now living knows how to mix would fail—as don't I know they would?—to give you the exquisite delicate bloom on her cheeks, the velvet, pearly whiteness of her ears, throat, forehead, the rich brown and gold of her plentiful, beautiful hair, the sweet clear carving of her nostrils and brow, the dark yet luminous

gray of her large eyes, oh ! not to mention the *soul* in them, the flashing spirit of intelligence, the magic play of emotion, what am I to do with ink ? What am I to make of such perfections when I have no better brush in my hand than a pen to paint them with ? And yet, though it is more than twenty years ago, I see her as she turned to bow and smile, when my uncle introduced me, as plainly now as I did then—the very pretty hat, the long black feather tenderly coiling over the back of her hair towards her neck as if to kiss it, the plaid dress—no, not plaid, check I mean, small black and white bars crossing, the material,—silk would it be ?—fitting her like the glove upon her hand, and expressing without emphasizing (as every good dressmaker knows how) just the type of figure a man's eye loves to dwell on ; a really beautiful shape with a perfectly proportioned waist, not one of those hiatuses in the meaning of the female body which bequeaths all the sense that ought to lie amidships to the hips. Yes, I see her now as I saw her then, and yet I cannot describe her. A great pity, for on my word of honour she was the sweetest woman living, and ought to be handled by an artist instead of a shell-back still smelling of the pitch-kettle.

Well, the talk, of course, would be mere commonplace at this start. My aunt expressed her joy at her husband having found me out ; she was

delighted to see me; did I know Clifton? she was sure I should be charmed with the scenery, and so on. And then my uncle burst forth: "Come, Jack, let me show you your room. We dine at eight, which is an hour later than usual," and we went upstairs.

If my visit were going to make any lengthened portion of this story, I should be tempted to write a page or two about this house in which I found my uncle and his family living, for nothing completer and better in its way have I ever seen. I admired everything as I went upstairs, my uncle showing the road with a delighted face—the fine stone staircase, the conservatories, the decorations, and the like—until we came to a large bedroom lighted by a number of candles, as handsome a room as a king's guest could expect, and, in this country, perhaps a better than he would get, with an open window looking on to the front grounds, which lay dark in the shadow of the twilight, a hundred sweet scents floating up out of them on the dew-laden folds of air that stirred softly. The stars were dropping into their places, a faint haze of crimson lingered in the west, and now and again the sky was tinged with the delicate violet glare of lightning; and pretty amid the stillness was the tinkling music played by the fountain.

"After London," said I, "this is indeed delightful!"

"Well, my boy, you are heartily welcome—most heartily welcome," exclaimed my uncle, clapping me on the shoulder. "Don't trouble to dress for dinner; we're very homely—at least *I* am, and hate any kind of fuss."

He then went away, and shortly afterwards I followed him to the drawing-room, where I found all the family but my Cousin Amelia, Miss Hawke, as I supposed, having left. I took a seat near my aunt, and was about to tell her how surprised I had been by her husband's visit, when something under my chair touched my leg. I hopped up, and on looking perceived that it was Miss Hawke's old terrier.

"What did you think, Jack—that it was a rat?" cried my uncle, laughing at the manner in which I had whipped on to my feet.

"Isn't it Miss Hawke's dog?" said I.

"Yes," replied my aunt; "we have induced her to stay and dine with us."

"Not the dog, but Miss Hawke, Jack," said my uncle.

"Don't you think her very pretty, Mr. Seymour?" said my Cousin Sophie.

"Mr. Seymour!" shouted my uncle; "whoever heard a girl call her cousin 'mister' before? My dear Sophie, yonder young fellow is your Cousin Jack; pray call him so, and make him feel that he is with relatives."

"Ay, please do," said I.

She blushed and laughed and said, "Very well, I will call you Jack."

"Yes, Sophie," I replied, plumping out her name, "I do think Miss Hawke very pretty—wonderfully pretty."

"You're right, nephew," said my uncle; "in all my travels I never came across anything sweeter—the object of my earliest affections alone excepted," giving his wife a bow.

"She's an Australian," said my aunt.

"Indeed!" I exclaimed, though why I should have said "Indeed!" in a tone of surprise I really do not know, for is not Australia as rich in pretty women as any other country or continent—allowing for numbers?

"Yes," said my aunt; "she was born in Australia. Her father made his money out there, and we believe he is a very rich man. He lives in a fine house a short walk from here."

"I made his acquaintance in a journey to London," said my uncle. "His Christian name is Alphonso, and I have heard Florence talk of one Damaris Hawke, an aunt who lives in Australia. What d'ye think, Jack, of Alphonso and Damaris as a pair of names for a small tea-party? He's a pompous old chap—between you and me, a bit of a prig—with strong aristocratic leanings; man, you should see his crest! Yet, in spite of my democratic wide-

awake and the republican cut of my jib," said he, looking down at his clothes, which were of the same pattern as those he had worn when he called upon me, "he was pleased to exchange cards, and on his return from town called with his daughter."

"What I like most in Florence Hawke," said Sophie, "is her unaffectedness. She is very pretty, she will no doubt be very rich, but she is quite unspoiled, and as artless and simple as a little girl."

"She will of course have many admirers," said I.

"She might have, you may take your affidavit," answered my uncle, "but her father's a taut hand, my girls say, and nobody dare go near. What's the name of the youngster, Sophia, old Hawke is tacking to fetch?"

"Reginald Morecombe," replied my aunt. "His father is a baronet, and Mr. Reginald will get the title. There's something I do not much like in views of that kind in parents. I have only met Mr. Morecombe once, but once was enough to discover that he is a very simpering young man, rather conceited, very much given to boasting about what he and Mr. Hawke call blood, and quite capable, no doubt, of believing that he would be doing this beautiful girl much honour by taking her papa's money in exchange for his name."

"Self-made Australians are generally fond of titles," said Sophie.

"We're all fond of titles," said I. "I for one

should be well pleased to be a lord ; not because I value the rank, but because I value the world's valuation of it."

"In my opinion," observed my aunt, "the very worst man a girl can have for a husband is a fool."

"Quite right," said my uncle ; "a woman can never get lower than that."

"But Florence has to marry Mr. Morecombe first, mamma," said Sophie.

At this point of a conversation that was both interesting and instructive Miss Hawke and Amelia came in. Amelia was stouter, let me say fatter, than Sophie ; she had three chins and a bust as plump as the bows of a galliot. I doubt if Miss Hawke could have chosen a better contrast for her own delightful shape, and as they entered and crossed the room side by side, I not only found my eyes rivetted to the beautiful face of this young Australian lady, and my head rotating after her, as you may see a little metal duck in a basin of water follow a magnet, but I was surprised by a queer fluttering sensation under my waistcoat ; a feeling as if my heart had got out of gear and were rolling about on a ground-swell of emotion.

However, no time was allowed me to consider what this might mean. Scarcely had the young ladies entered, when the man-servant was seen standing in the door, exclaiming that dinner was ready. We trooped into the dining-room, my aunt

on my arm and Miss Hawke on my uncle's, and took our seats. Here was another fine apartment, with large portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Seymour facing each other, and the soft light of wax candles and sperm oil to dine by. Miss Hawke sat opposite me, just clear of the flowers in the centre of the table, so that I had her full in sight throughout the dinner. I will not say that she looked more bewitching without her hat; let her go dressed as she chose she would have been fascinating—upon my word, even my uncle's wideawake would have become her! But if she did not look more bewitching, she was not less so now that her hair was exposed, with its dainty little parting on the left side vanishing amid a soft mass of clustering fluffy silken locks on her white forehead, and coils of thick plaits crowning her, and a rose—a small newly-blown rose—glimmering like a jewel among those most lovely folds.

For the first time that ever I can remember I felt nervous in the presence of a lady—yes, this girl sitting opposite to me, and bringing from time to time the whole broadside of her beauty and intelligence to bear by letting her eyes rest on me with a kind of inquiry in them, as if she were quietly taking stock of the young sailorified chap fronting her, and wondering if he was really a nautical man, and if not, what business he had in seeming one; I say, that at the start Miss Florence

Hawke made me feel as shy as a schoolboy at an evening party. Positively, at one moment I was so nervous that I did not dare lift a glass of wine for fear of spilling it over what a tailor would call my continuations.

Fortunately for me, however, my uncle talked incessantly, so that what with having to listen to him, and what with having to attend to what the servants put before them, the others were too busy to notice my manner. At all events, I thought so, and that helped me greatly in working myself on to a level keel again.

All the conversation at the going off was about my father, about my uncle's discovery of me, and so forth.

"How nice it must be, Mr. Seymour, to meet with relations unexpectedly!" said Miss Hawke to me.

"Yes," I stammered, "very nice indeed—at least, I mean, it depends." And here, seeing that I bade fair to make an ass of myself, I laid hold of my nerves and said, "When I say depends, I should explain, Miss Hawke, that relations unexpectedly met are not always nice. As an instance, imagine a man addressing a room full of electors; he wants the voters to believe him not only a Tory but a well-connected man. In the midst of his speech a noise is heard, and a woman, disguised in liquor, with a bonnet on her back, shoves through

the door, saying, ‘ I have a right to be here ; he is my brother ! ’ ”

This produced a laugh, and reminded my uncle of an anecdote, the telling of which took the conversation off the course it had been steering, for which I was grateful, as I was nervous and apt on such a topic as relations to be *gauche*, and even offensive, without meaning it. My aunt now asked me questions about myself—how long had I been at sea ? what induced me to abandon it ? what parts of the world I had sailed into ? My answers were listened to with great attention ; indeed, my two cousins took a most flattering interest in me, and by a kind of sisterly sympathy of smile and look—I do not know how else to describe a manner that was immediately and pleasantly sensible to me —made me feel, long before we had finished dinner, that I had known them since they were children.

I saw Miss Hawke round her lovely eyes when I talked of the sea, and mentioned having been to Sydney, New South Wales.

“ What did you think of the bay ? ” she asked. “ Is it not lovely ? I was born in Sydney ; but it is not because that town is my native place that I consider its bay must be the beautifulest scene in the world.”

“ It is beautiful ! ” I exclaimed warmly, excited into enthusiasm by her advocacy. Had she praised the kangaroo for its graceful movements, I should

have sworn that the capers of a Taglioni or a Vestris were not a patch upon the poetical motions of that animal. "Do you know it, uncle?"

"Well," answered he, "it is very fine, but it don't come up to Rio."

"Oh yes, it does," said I. "Miss Hawke, be quite easy; Sydney Bay tops the whole world's scenery for beauty."

My uncle laughed, and so did my aunt, and I saw my cousins exchange a faint smile, all which made me suppose that something more was to be seen in my manner than I had any idea was visible or even existing. I cast my eyes down and revolved a wine-glass on the table, whilst my uncle asked Miss Hawke if she liked sailors.

Miss Hawke. Very much indeed.

My Uncle. That's brave. Whenever I recall my old profession I love to believe that the ladies like sailors.

Sophie. Sailors are so unconventional; I always think them the best society in the world, for that reason. There is no nonsense, no hunting about for compliments and neat sayings. What they feel they say. And then their conversation is full of colour, for they are always travelling and seeing something new. *I like* sailors. (With emphasis).

Amelia. So do I.

Myself. I wish I were still at sea; I should be able to bow to all this.

My Uncle. I say, nephew, what d'ye think of Sophie's idea of Jack's talk being full of colour ? (Here he tipped me a wink.) Is it full of colour when the scuttle is thumped in a gale of wind to the roar of "All hands ! Tumble up, my lively hearties ! Don't wait to shave ! " ?

Miss Hawke (laughing). I have heard that cry of "All hands !" What a pity there is no short cut to Australia ! Cape Horn is very dreadful ! Coming to England this time we nearly ran into an iceberg in a snow-storm.

My Aunt (clasping her hands). Just think if you had run into it !

Myself. How often have you made the voyage, Miss Hawke ?

Miss Hawke. Twice.

Myself. Are you likely to return to Australia ?

Miss Hawke. I think not. I cannot say. Papa will certainly never return to stop there. He prefers England.

My Uncle. And you ?

Miss Hawke. I like Clifton ; but I wish we could get the Australian climate here. It is always either too hot or too cold.

Myself. Do you not prefer London to the country ?

Miss Hawke. No ; and papa hates London.

My Uncle. And so do I. Life is too stiff in London. Here, if I wear a wideawake nobody takes

any notice ; in London people stare as if I were a patriot. And look, Miss Florence, how easily and pleasantly one forms acquaintances and makes friends in the country. We have not been here very long, and already we know many persons, and one delightful lady (bowing to her), who kindly takes us as we are, dispenses with all the formalities which would hedge her about in London, and make her charming society a luxury to be obtained only at long intervals.

My Aunt (speaking doubtfully). I should not very much care to live in London. The society that is worth having is very difficult to get.

My Uncle. And when got, not worth having.

Miss Hawke. Papa likes ceremony, but I don't. I enjoy unexpected things : an impromptu carpet-dance, dining out as I am now. When you are asked to anything, you anticipate the pleasure of it, and that is why set affairs are often disappointing.

My Uncle. We are unconventional enough. I never could endure any fuss. My wife and I have had to rough it in a country where people who suffer from corns have no business to live ; for boots over there are heavy, and folks are given to shoving and stamping. My daughters are like their parents ; they take short views and simple ones. Sophie—Amelia—your health, my loves. May you marry men of sense, and live for yourselves instead of for your neighbours. (He smiled

affectionately at them over a glass of claret.) When do you expect your father back, Miss Florence ?

Miss Hawke. To-morrow.

My Aunt. Will he bring Emily with him ?

Miss Hawke. Yes ; and Mr. Morecombe.

My cousins exchanged looks, and the merest shadow of a smile flitted over Miss Hawke's sweet mouth as she stole a glance at Sophie. Evidently this Mr. Morecombe was a not wholly unfamiliar topic amongst these three young ladies.

"Don't you feel alone in your big house ?" asked my uncle.

"No," she answered, "I never feel dull. I rather like being alone—sometimes."

Evidently she has no mother, thought I. By this time my nervousness had worn off, and I could take peeps at her with some degree of confidence. Why did fate place me plump opposite her ? I would look from her to the beautiful cluster of flowers in the middle of the table, and from them to her, until the most exquisite of God's works—a lovely woman's face and the shining tints and sweet forms of flowers and foliage—were combined in one impression ; so that never after could I think of her without associating her image with the white and violet and purple petals which filled the room with a fragrance that seemed to me as the breath from her delicate lips.

But, you tarpaulin, you ! This is *too* fine ! This

is the mere ecstasy of parish clatter! Was I in love with her *then* that I should write down all this aromatic stuff in *this* place? Alas! What do I know? Put me on my oath and I will say—Yes! I *was* in love; my peace of mind was gone! I had met my fate, and sat beholding it with a thumping heart.

By-and-by the ladies left the room, and a box of cigars was put upon the table. My uncle opened the tall folding windows, through which you could step on to the lawn, and we stood together to get the air, smoking and looking at the night. There was a small moon behind the house; the sky was very black and full of stars; far away in the quarter we faced there was a faint play of sheet lightning, scarcely more vivid than the silvery flash of the meteors which broke out from the dark air under the stars and sailed away in a line of spangles; a delicious country silence reigned around, broken only by the distant quick throbbing and rumbling noise of a locomotive dragging a train of carriages, and by the cool plashing of a fountain, and by the rich notes of a nightingale piping hard by.

“Can’t you understand why I prefer this sort of thing to London?” exclaimed my uncle, speaking through his nose, with the Yankee drawl I had noticed in him when we first met.

“Of course I do,” I replied; “I would not exchange this for London if I had it.”

"Pompous as old Hawke is, he's not an ass," continued my uncle. "He sticks to Clifton, which proves that he has intellect. He lives in a finer house than this, though he has not the same extent of ground. We'll go and dine with him some of these nights. He's hospitable enough, but a damned old prig. He wants to get a title into his family, and get it he will, though he has to drag it in by the head and ears, and perhaps half murder the poor girl he calls upon to help him."

"I heard Miss Hawke say that young Mr. Morecombe was coming to-morrow with the old fellow," said I. "How long has this been going on?"

"What d'ye mean? How long has young Morecombe been on the *tappy*, as Johnny Crapaud says?"

"Ay."

"Two or three months, I reckon."

"Has he proposed?"

"Lord love ye, how do I know? but I should say not. This is fine tobacco, Jack. Real cigars, I call these."

"Yes," said I; "they are very fine indeed. What was Mr. Hawke?"

"Well, I believe he made his money as a squatter. He is quiet about his beginning; possibly he's ashamed of having got money by working for it. I reckon he squatted. There's

squatting in his soul ; it may be traced in his walk, and followed, as the poet says, in his smile."

"Have you ever met his friend, Mr. Morecombe ?" said I, trying to make believe that I asked these questions merely for the sake of talking, and that I would just as soon speak of consols, or take his views on the molasses market.

"Once ; I dined with him at Hawke's. A puppy, sir ; a poor creature with a parting down the middle of its hair and a glass in its eye, and immense stiff stick-up shirt-collars. Hawke will not get his daughter to have him, he may be cocksure of that. She is destined for a man, not for a monkey. How social she is ! This evening Sophie, who was among the flowers, saw her pass and called her in. And then she stays and dines without requiring any further pressing than a plain 'Will you ?' That's the sort of friendliness I like in man or woman. And my eye, nephew ! what a face, hey ? If I were only a quarter of a century younger—if I were only a single man ! "

He made several motions with his arms, that by dumbshow he might express the ecstasy his imagination flung him into, then smelt to his cigar and said that he defied any importer in the country to beat that brand.

I felt that he was just one of those men whom a young fellow could bare his soul to ; and nothing prevented me from telling him how desperately

impressed I was by Miss Florence Hawke but the consideration that he had daughters of his own. He presently gave me a chance of expressing my admiration of my cousins by speaking of his wife.

"How d'ye like her, Jack?"

"I cannot tell you how much. She is all kindness; and is she not a very clever woman?"

"Well, if a man wears a diamond on his finger there is no reason why he should talk about it as if he were a jeweller," said he. "Sophia is my wife: and that fact belays all I should like to say about her. But one thing I'll assert—a realler woman doesn't walk the surface of this globe. There may be women as real, but nothing realler. There are no half-laughs and pursers' grins about *her*. She's straight up and down, both ends of her bolted and clinched in the cast-iron of solid principles. Yes, siree, your aunt's a woman; a Canadian, sir—the daughter of a colony whose females are clippers of the first quality, handsome in make, swift in action, staunch in build, faithful to the hand that steers 'em. And though it's not for me to call your attention to such matters—more particularly as they are perfectly obvious—yet let me suggest that, considering her age, you have probably met younger women, reckoned handsome in their way, without her figure, her taste in dress, and her complexion. Eh?"

I fully agreed and said, "And your daughters?

Have you no word for them? I declare I have never seen kinder faces, nor been charmed by gentler and more winning manners."

"Ay, they are very well, they are very well," he exclaimed in a soft voice. "They are good girls. They have sound hearts. I thank God for that. A parent has no right to expect more."

And whilst we finished our cigars he told me of his early struggles, what a noble helpmate he had in his wife, to whom he had been married five-and-twenty years; and then talked of my father, and asked questions about my mother, who she was, what relatives I had on her side, and so forth. But it was now time to pitch the end of our cigars away and join the ladies, who we found in chairs round the tall open windows, listening to the faint strains of a distant band of music audible on this side of the house only.

"What's that they are blowing?" inquired my uncle.

"It sounds like 'God save the Queen,'" said Sophie.

"Has Australia a national song?" asked my aunt.

"Why, of course—'God save the Queen,' mamma," said Amelia.

"No, excuse me," said I; "the Australian anthem is 'Cheer up, Sam.'"

"What!" cried my uncle; "d'ye mean 'Cheer

up, Sam, don't let your spirits go down ?' Is my nephew right, Miss Florence ?'

"We put 'God save the Queen' first, I believe," she answered, laughing; "but everybody in Australia is fond of 'Cheer up, Sam !'"

This led to my aunt asking Miss Hawke to sing, to which she consented on condition that Amelia sang first. So my cousin went to the piano and piped in a small blithe note about some merry, merry man who broke an unfortunate girl's heart, and yet continued very merry, ri fol de lol ! proving what odious rogues merry, merry men are. Then Miss Hawke, after a little hesitation and a timid peep at me with her lovely eyes, took her place and warbled a ballad. I have no recollection of the air; I do not remember that I gathered what the poetry was about; but for all that I considered it the divinest song I had ever heard. Was it some commonplace tune? were the words of the album type—the Letitia-Elizabeth-Landon-and-broken-heart-and-dishevelled-ringlets school? Very like, very like; but no incomparable Italian artist singing some air of matchless beauty could have overwhelmed me with such emotions as those raised in me by Miss Hawke's simple, pretty voice, the airy, graceful, flower-like pose of her figure, her white hands, with a ring or two on them, trembling like blown snow-flakes which glittered with the sparkle of ice-crystals as they moved over

the ivory keys, her rich hair taking a ruddy tinge of gold from the soft lamplight, the sweetest of little feet coquetting with the pedals.

I protest, when I think of her I long like Werther to take my flowing locks in both hands and pour out my soul. Dissembling was idle. When more than a man's heart will hold is poured into it, then, like any other vessel—a hook-pot or a washing-tub—it will overflow. I was perfectly sensible that there was a note of something exceedingly like impassioned admiration in the thanks I added to those of the others for her song; but I could not help it. Amelia looked at me, Sophie at her mother, and her mother fanned herself. Miss Hawke said, "You are too kind, Mr. Seymour, to praise me so warmly; my voice is a very poor one;" whilst my uncle observed, "I don't know; it looks to me as if Jack had a cultivated taste;" on which I gave a wild laugh.

Miss Hawke then somewhat bashfully asked if *I* would sing. (What! before ladies? thought I. Never!) I told her that my knowledge of music did not enable me to reach to anything higher than a windlass chorus.

"Then, give us one of the old chanteys," exclaimed my uncle. "'Haul the Bowline,' or 'Whiskey, Johnny,' or 'Run, let the Bulljine run.' Why, the mere sound of those old songs takes me back forty years, and I seem to be standing in the

lee scuppers up to my neck, or holding on with my eyelids as I try to roll up the fore-royal single-handed."

However, I declined to sing, and they gave up pressing me. Tea was brought in, and we sat with cups and saucers in our hands talking a variety of small beer, until Miss Hawke, pulling a watch of the size of a sixpence from her waistband, said that it was getting late—she must go home; whereupon my uncle said he would walk with her to her house, and half turned to me in a manner that made me hope he was going to ask me to join him; but instead he observed, "I shan't be above twenty minutes, Jack. Don't go to bed; we'll have a cigar when I return." Of course I endeavoured to look satisfied and happy, though I would cheerfully have given up smoking for a month for the privilege of helping him to see Miss Hawke home.

Well, presently she came down dressed, looking lovely in the lamplight in her bewitching hat, and said good-night to us, and I saw my uncle lurking in the hall with his wideawake on, and wished him at Jericho for leaving me behind. She left the room, but came back in a moment, crying out in her melodious way, "Oh, I have forgotten Flora! Where's my ducky Flora?"

My uncle whistled, my aunt made a noise like a hen, and my cousins peered about. I looked

under the sofa, and found the old creature snugged up into a ball and snoring like a young negro.

"Here's Flora," said I, dropping on one knee, meaning to haul the animal out and gallantly place her in her mistress's arms; but the moment I touched the aged beast, that was evidently very deaf, she staggered on to her legs with her tail on end like an ensign staff on a ship's stern, snapped at my hand, and went reeling under the sofa into the room, backing away, and making a most horrible faint barking noise.

"Don't be afraid, Mr. Seymour," said Miss Hawke; "she's the sweetest, most harmless, the dearest old thing—aren't you, Flora?" and she took the quivering, grinning, terrified, deaf, asthmatical old brute to her heart, and put her lips to the worn-out skin of the creature's head and fondled it. She then went away for good, giving us all a beautiful smile as she quitted the room, and I sat down with my aunt and cousins to chat with them until my uncle returned.

CHAPTER IV.

SOME SACRED MUSIC.

I WENT to bed at half-past eleven that night. My aunt, in the most affectionate manner, hoped I would sleep well ; my cousins bade me good-night with the kindness of sisters ; my uncle accompanied me to my bedroom in order to see that I was properly cared for, and parted from me with every manifestation of cordial pleasure at my presence, begging me to feel completely at home, to do as I pleased, to ask for whatever I wanted, to enjoy myself thoroughly, and to stay as long as ever I chose.

Could mortal uncle say more to a nephew ? And what a delightful, fragrant, breezy bedroom was mine ! And yet, though I was in bed by twelve, the lights out, not a sound to disturb me outside save it were now and again a moan of night-wind to rustle the flowers under the window and shake their sweetness into the dark, star-laden air, I did not close my eyes in sleep till four o'clock.

No Chancery litigant whose three years' suit is in all probability to end next day; no young actor whose first appearance in London is fixed for the following night; no distracted tradesman with several heavy bills, renewed *ad nauseam*, falling due next morning, could have plunged and rolled upon his mattress more wearily and sleeplessly than I. To say that I was so much in love with Florence Hawke as to be unable to close my eyes through thinking of her would be to say a little too much. If ever a man fell in love at first sight, I did; I'll not deny it. I thought Miss Hawke a beautiful creature, with the manner of a queen and the sweetness of an angel; and I was in love with her, though a few hours before I had never heard of her; I had not the least idea that there was such a person in the world. But I am not going to pretend that I was such an emotional, impressionable, sentimental swab that I could be robbed of my sleep right away out of hand by the first pretty woman I had ever seen, whom I felt I could marry and live happily with ever after.

And yet she was responsible for my sleeplessness, too, for I lay thinking of her until I thought myself into broad wakefulness, though I had gone tired to bed, as a man who may be hungry at his usual hour for dining finds his appetite gone if the dinner be long delayed. Being of a somewhat imaginative mind, I pictured her as forced by her

father into accepting Mr. Morecombe, and I thought of myself as going to the rescue and attacking old Hawke and withering him up with a thousand penetrating and scathing sarcasms, and my humour actually carried me into the imagination of horsewhipping young Morecombe for being rude to me. What wit visits one in bed where it is of no use! What conflicts one has there with one's enemies in the silence of night, and how victorious one always is!

However, I fell asleep at last, and when I was called by a servant was thankful to find that the night was gone, and my job of kicking the bed-clothes about done for the time being. There must be something very noxious and nauseous in the London air to make the breezes of the country or the seaside the delights they are to Cockney nostrils. Spite of my night of broken rest, I felt a stone lighter in weight as I moved about the room dressing myself. The atmosphere was delicious: a warm, aromatic tide that hummed pleasantly through the window, and was full of the chanting of bees, radiant with the tossing and blown flight of butterflies, and there was a sound of the throbbing life of Bristol city pulsing in it.

I found my relations in the breakfast-room: not one of those gloomy subterranean chambers so called which you find in London houses, and which are occupied by the blackbeetles when the family

are away, but a handsome, cheerful apartment made green and cool by the shadows of some trees which stood close against that side of the house. I was warmly greeted, and answered the kind inquiries as to the night I had passed by saying that when I fell asleep I slept like a top, which was true enough.

"I'll tell you," said my uncle, "how you may kill the time here. There is a fast mare in the stable at your disposal whenever you have a mind for a canter. Can you ride?"

"Yes, if there's pommel enough to hold on by."

"Then there is a snug phaeton in which you can drive yourself and your aunt and your cousins round the country—I don't mean Great Britain, but the neighbourhood. There is the club at Bristol. I have put your name down, and you can use it whilst you are here. You have the sea within easy reach. Wales is not far off, and you can fetch any of the Channel ports whenever you like by steamer from Bristol. I don't know whether we shall be able to manufacture any dances for you—we have not been here long enough to be able to fill a room—but dinners I think we can promise; and what further programme can we make out, Sophia?"

"Nothing further is wanted," said I. "It is already most hospitably abundant."

Presently my aunt said something about Florence

Hawke, and asked Amelia at what hour that day Mr. Hawke was expected.

"At five or six this afternoon," was the reply. "There's an anthem I much want to hear to be sung at service this morning in the Cathedral, and I arranged yesterday with Florence to go. We shall walk there, and her carriage will fetch us."

"Will you take me?" said I. "Nothing delights me so much as sacred music."

"By all means come," answered my kind cousin.

"Miss Hawke, I hope, won't think me intrusive?" said I.

"Why should she?" exclaimed the hearty, good-natured Sophie.

"Intrusive! You mean complimentary," observed my uncle. "D'ye suppose, man, she'll reckon you go for the love of music?"

The downrightness of this somewhat abashed me. "But I should like to hear the music," said I; "and is not the Cathedral worth seeing?"

"Never was in it," he answered.

"I am thinking," said my aunt, addressing her husband, and then looking at her daughters as if seeking for encouragement to deliver what was in her mind, "that Mr. Hawke might—I mean, that as we cannot pretend to be ignorant of his views respecting—"

"What, my love? What do you want to say?" asked my uncle.

"Why," she continued, "he might not perhaps like Florence to—he might not thank us for introducing—" She could not go on, perhaps not liking to be too plain, and yet not knowing how to convey her meaning otherwise than plainly. But we all guessed what she meant, and my uncle said—

"Let old Mr. Hawke hang himself. What is it to us? If he objects to his daughter meeting young men, let him lock her up. I really cannot confine Jack to his bedroom because, being at large, he is likely to annoy Mr. Hawke by being polite to his daughter when he meets her, and by offering to accompany her and his cousin—his cousin, my dear—to hear a performance of sacred music."

"I shouldn't be too sensitive about Mr. Hawke's feelings, mamma, if I were you," said Sophie. "Why shouldn't Cousin Jack know Florence, and walk with her and Amelia? I am sure he is worth a thousand Mr. Morecombes."

"Say twenty thousand, Sophie," I exclaimed, feeling that I could hug the dear girl for her goodness and loyalty.

"I am a father myself," said my uncle, lying back in his chair and taking a complacent look round the table, "and I should be very sorry to do anything calculated to bother a man in his wishes concerning his children. But I am not going to trouble myself on matters I *can't* help. I should be sorry to call upon Mr. Hawke and

tell him that in my opinion he is a *prig*, for subordinating his daughter's happiness in the future to a twopenny anxiety to drag some poor creature of a man into the family, whose one recommendation is that when his father dies he will be a baronet. I would not tell him that, I say. But d'ye suppose I'm not going to have my brother's son to stop with me, that I am going to shut my door against my own sex, because Miss Florence visits here, and old Hawke would be angry if she should go and give her heart to one of my guests instead of reserving it—or the shell of it, for it'll be but a hollow thing she presents if she's forced to hand it over to the wrong man—instead of reserving it, I say, for the coxcomb her father wants her to have?"

"Well, I am sure I never thought my remarks would have led to all this," said my aunt ruefully. "Nobody could have a greater contempt for Mr. Hawke's notions of marriage than I. All that I meant to say was that we, as acquaintances and neighbours of his—I mean, that as Florence very often comes to see us——" Here she broke down again.

I felt it time to speak.

"Why this anxiety, aunt? Am I going to pounce upon the young lady and carry her off? Is it the dove that usually bolts with the hawk? I admit that she is a lovely girl. There would be nothing

very astonishing in any guest or male friend of yours falling in love with her ; but if he flattered himself on *winning* her, I should either consider him demented or insufferably conceited. But as you object to my——”

“No, no ! ” she interrupted, “I don’t object—indeed not, Mr. Jack. I only—what I mean is—indeed, if you don’t accompany her and Amelia you’ll make me feel quite uncomfortable.”

This ended it, my uncle rounding it off with a burst of laughter.

I can be as fastidious in my views as my betters, and I yield to no man in respecting the right sort of parental opinions on the duties and behaviour of young ladies ; and when therefore I look back, I am unable to find the least possible impropriety in my volunteering to escort two girls to service at a Cathedral to hear a particular anthem sung. Yet suppose I had not been strictly within, and well within, the bounds of decorum, I should still have begged my cousin to take me to the service and risked the chance of being thought improper. My uncle was right ; it was not the sacred music, it was not the Cathedral that drew me. I wanted to be in Miss Florence’s company again ; I wanted to enjoy the delight of being near her, of being able to see her beautiful face and hear her sweet voice.

So, shortly after breakfast, Amelia and I left the house for Clifton Lodge (let Mr. Hawke’s residence

have that name), I handsomely equipped with a gay flower that loyal and tender-hearted Sophie had pinned upon my coat whilst I waited in the hall for Amelia, and my cousin in bright colours which she topped with a green parasol that gave her warm fat face a kind of copper-like splendour. Our road took us from the valley of the Avon, and when you are out of sight of that fairy-like ravine, the noble heights of rocks, the shining river that winds at bottom, and the wonders of vegetation whose rich summer hues make the whole place like a piece of tropical scenery, Clifton does not offer many points for a man to posture over in description. I own I was not rendered emotional by the sight of dust and villas. My thoughts were considerably ahead of me—along with Miss Florence Hawke : and I believe, had the Alps been shifted by an earthquake and brought alongside, I should not have taken much notice of them.

We arrived at the house, and a very handsome building it was : square, detached, with a sort of tower upon it, and stone figures of angels or graces or muses at the corners. It was as big again as my uncle's ; but whether I was prejudiced by what I had heard of old Hawke, or whether the house was really suggestive, as I found it, it seemed to me, for all its conservatories, its rich window drapery, its steps, pillars, and the rest of it, a cold, formal, precise-looking home. It had a look

of opulent genteelness, and if I had been asked to design a house for a rich man who was without blood, and anxious to procure some, Clifton Lodge is the sort of residence I should have given him.

There was a short carriage drive to the door : we marched along with powdered boots, and pulled the bell. A fellow in grand livery opened the door and conducted us to the drawing-room, quite too sumptuously furnished for my taste, much as I value the fine and the beautiful : full of gilt and marble, with a hand-painted ceiling—in short, pretty nearly as overpowering as one of Lord Bute's rooms in Cardiff Castle, which I had the honour to inspect when I visited that part.

“Mighty splendid!” said I to Amelia, looking about me and missing something—I don’t know what—which had it been there would have prevented me from finding it so hard and cold.
“And this is Miss Hawke’s home?”

“Is it not very magnificent?” whispered my cousin. “Mr. Hawke must have brought a lot of Australian gold with him to Clifton, for everything seems gold here. Aren’t you surprised now to think how unaffected and childlike Florence is? One would suppose that a girl living in such splendour would think herself too good for anybody but lords and ladies.”

“Well,” said I, “if I lived here I don’t know .

that I should be able to walk. The earth would be too low for my boots. Surely her father ought to have a soul above the son of a baronet!" said I, glaring at a lady in a cloud blowing a trumpet amid a grummet of flowers upon the ceiling.

"The son will be the eighth baronet when he gets it," said she. "And I believe the More-combes are connected in various ways with about twenty titled families."

A plague upon him and his connections, thought I; and as this benediction upon him rolled up out of my soul Miss Hawke came in, dressed for the walk. She looked surprised to see me, and slightly blushed. I presume, when the footman gave our name she supposed I was my uncle. But the look was all the expression her surprise found, and it was replaced by a smile, so uncommonly like one of pleasure, that as it passed over her face my heart struck a loud whop in my bosom.

She gave me her little gloved hand to shake, said she was very glad to see me, and asked if I was going to the Cathedral with them.

"Yes, if I may," said I. "When Amelia spoke of the [anthem, I begged leave to hear it too. I hope I am not intrusive. Nobody asked me. I am here by my own invitation."

"Why shouldn't you come?" said she, smiling, but looking shyly. "The choir is a good one. If you like sacred music, you will enjoy the singing."

As we left the house I asked if the Cathedral was far.

"Almost far enough for a drive if you are a bad walker," she answered.

"We shall drive back," said Amelia. "The way is nearly all down-hill. Not that I very much care to use a carriage when I go to church, even on week-days. I dislike seeing people roll up to a church door as if they expected the vicar, and his curates, and the pew-opener, and the sexton to come out and stand in a row and bow to them. It is excusable, perhaps, on a week-day, or when people are old or have the gout."

"Yes, at church we are all equals," said I, "and ought to arrive on foot, the nobleman and the chimney-sweep, the footman and the baronet."

I brought in the word *baronet* for the sake of putting a little malicious emphasis upon it; but Miss Florence took no notice. What an adorable profile was hers to turn to as I walked by her side! There was not an atom of stiffness in her talk. Had we been auld acquaintance she could not have addressed me more freely and pleasantly. She laughed at my little jokes (little they were), asked me about the sea, wondered how I could have had the heart to give up the life and liberty of the ocean, and spoke of the sailor's calling as the manliest in the world.

"What!" cried Amelia, "more manly than the soldier's?"

"Certainly," she answered; "they cannot be mentioned in the same breath. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Seymour?"

"Agree with you, Miss Hawke! indeed I do, from the bottom of my heart!" I answered, and I barely saved myself from adding that had she argued in favour of the soldier's life I should have agreed with her with all my soul, just the same.

It was a very short walk to me. When Amelia said, "The Cathedral, Jack, is in College Green there, just round the corner," I exclaimed, "I thought you said, Miss Hawke, that it was almost far enough for a drive? Were it five times further it would not be too far for me."

Very hot it was, being a cloudless morning, and many a fathom we measured without meeting the relief of an inch of shade; but though corpulence is not popularly supposed to revel in the dog-days, my fat and amiable cousin declared she enjoyed the heat, and walked as if perspiration had been prescribed; whilst the only effect produced on Miss Florence by the exercise and the temperature was a slight deepening of the delicate peachlike tint on her cheeks. As I swung along at her side, listening to her pretty voice and looking at her charming face, it seemed difficult to realize that yesterday at that hour, ay, and for some hours later, she had

no existence so far as I was concerned. Indeed, I seemed to have known her an age—a notion produced probably by my thoughts having been full of her from the moment I clapped eyes on her.

I should like to be able to write in praise of Bristol Cathedral. The mere circumstance of Florence Hawke living in the neighbourhood ought to have made living poetry and beauty not only of the old pile, but of every brick and chimney-pot in the city. But there is a nakedness and a most unlovely grimness about the Cathedral that renders admiration very difficult. Outside, the structure has the look of a fortress, and inside it is as naked as a stable. The pews or benches are crowded together at one end, where there is a trifling show of ecclesiastical furniture ; and to reach those seats you have to navigate a small Atlantic Ocean of stone floor, with pillars on either side ; and the sterility of the cold and stony scene is emphasized, rather than relieved, by here and there—as widely scattered as currants in a sailor's dumpling—a memorial of brass or marble. In most cathedrals there is something to look at. What is shown may often be a sham. Still, a small stock of faith will enable you to gaze with interest, as for instance at the Black Prince's armour at Canterbury, which, for all one knows, may have been manufactured at Birmingham, whence a great number of ancient relics are, I believe, annually exported. But Bristol

Cathedral offers you nothing. Historic memories no doubt it has ; but there is nothing to touch, to hang over, to muse upon in the form of a tomb, an old banner, a stain on the flags where some holy man gave up the ghost.

And yet one church Bristol has that atones for the unfurnished Cathedral. I mean St. Mary Redcliffe. It is an architectural dream, most beautiful and tender. Why are not all churches equally lovely ? Were they so, I am sure we should all be more religious. Ladies, St. Mary Redcliffe is a church to get married in. Why, even a wedding for money—ay, even the nuptials of a foolish old rich woman with a sneaking rapacious young man—would take an idyllic character in St. Mary Redcliffe. But I say, Bristolians, where got you that effigy of poor little Chatterton ? Could anything be more foolish ? I'm a Dutchman if it isn't like a memorial to a tomtit. Think of a structure resembling a shrine surmounted by a caricature in little of a Lord Mayor of the last century ! Was Chatterton a genius ? 'Pon my word, I never could understand his ancient lingo ; but if he had no more talent than I have, who could not make a rhyme though ten pounds of pure Virginia were offered me for a couplet, may I be hanged if I would have consented to the erection of such a scarecrow had I hailed from old Sebastian Cabot's port.

Well, Miss Hawke and my cousin and I entered the Cathedral and joined the worshippers (few enough, but business is business, and this wasn't Sunday) and heard the anthem. A fine piece of rumbling music it was, and well sung. The memory of it would inspire me to attempt some elegant writing had I heard it in any other interior, say Durham, or Winchester (wherein I have knelt as a bairn), or Gloucester, but the nakedness of the building ran amuck with emotion. The dim, rich, holy light, the ghostly tatters of ancient banners hovering like petrified bats in the gloom of a dark roof that has reverberated the orisons of generations, the stone warriors on their backs with their mailed hands crossed upon their pale bosoms and their noses gone to join their souls, the satyr-like effigies which glower like the nightmares of mad Chinamen from darksome corners—such and a score of other sacerdotal wonders which no man who has heaved at a capstan and sat astride a yard-arm can be expected to remember, were wanting as adjuncts to that rolling and growling and swelling anthem in Bristol Cathedral.

And yet the grand melodies, the sweet and silver tenor notes, the tremulous thunder of the solemn organ echo in my soul to this hour, as a sacred setting of that poem of womanhood who sat on my right hand in a posture of devotion listening to the heavenly strains. Ay, depend upon it that any

girl who wants to enrich and make large and splendid a young man's idea of her cannot do better than carry him off to hear an anthem sung in a cathedral. The ball-room bequeaths the memory of white shoulders, sparkling eyes, waltzing measures, and so forth; the dinner-table pretty much the same thing, sometimes including the waltzing measures; the parlour experience is homely, and sentiment gets mixed up with darning, hemming, and such matters. But to sit by the side of a lovely girl in a cathedral and hear an anthem sung is to enjoy a singular elevation of emotion. She becomes a part of the sacred entertainment. She humanizes the music, and the music spiritualizes her. This may be rather German as a piece of subtlety, but none the less is it true. I can tell you this: I understood that anthem all the better for looking at Florence Hawke; yes, and I found her sweetness the sweeter and her womanly beauty the womanlier for watching her and thinking of her, to the tune that rolled out of the organ's melodious heart with a deep-throated reverberation that sometimes set the seat we were on quivering.

Service being over we came away, and outside found Alphonso Hawke's carriage—a regal turn-out, quite in keeping with the gilt and velvet and marble of Clifton Lodge. There was a device on the panels that looked uncommonly like a lord's, and might

have passed for something of the kind to a person not nicely acquainted with odds and ends of that sort.

"Is it too hot for a drive, dear, before we go home?" asked Miss Hawke, addressing Amelia, of course, for I was not dear yet.

"No; if it is not too hot to walk it is not too hot to drive," answered Amelia. "Would you like a drive, Jack?"

"Very much," said I. So we got into the carriage, Miss Hawke gave some directions to the footman, and off we went, honoured by the notice of everybody we encountered. Indeed, I never before observed people stare so hard at a carriage as the Bristolians we met did at ours. The reason lay in the men's livery, I think. It was as gaudy as a lord mayor's, a blaze of crimson and gold, and they had white hair and shining stockings. We talked of the anthem, and Miss Hawke asked me what I thought of the Cathedral. I gave her my opinion, and she agreed with me.

"It is the only disappointment I have," said she. "We Australians are always dreaming of the antiquities of England; and when papa told me we were going to live near a cathedral, I pictured a place like Westminster Abbey, full of wonderful tombs, glorious windows, beautiful monuments, and sanctified spots railed off and hidden in twilight. However, it is better than no cathedral at all."

This was about the most sensible thing that was said during the drive ; all the rest of the conversation was made up of the idle chatter which three persons—who are no company—will bestow on one another. The young ladies spoke of persons who were strangers to me : of Mrs. Jones' last dance ; of Mrs. Robinson's projected garden-party ; of Miss Chirrup learning singing with the idea of going on the stage. I had as much to say, too, as either of them, tried to be funny and made them laugh, anyhow. I took no notice of the course the coachman was steering ; whether he was heading north or south I could not say. It was enough for me that I was sitting opposite Florence Hawke, that my knee touched the sacred hem—let me call it hem—of her exquisitely-fitting dress, that I was breathing the atmosphere that her lovely presence made fragrant. I say that was enough for me. What did it matter how old red-and-gold on the box pulled the reins ? All that I desired was that he should not be in a hurry to carry us home. The drive was largely meant for me, I knew, and so now and again I would admire the scenery and ask whose house that was, and pretend to be interested in the landscape. But I have no recollection of the view. Nearly all that I can remember is Florence, her shining winning eyes, the light upon her hair, the delicate tint upon her face cast by the crimson parasol in her hand, her unaffected

laughter, and, best of all, shipmate, the real pleasure she seemed to find in my company, as if there was something in my talk that brightened up her spirits.

And why not? She loved Sydney, and I knew the place well. She liked sailors, and I had been one and was still one at heart. She had made long voyages, and could understand me only as a girl might who had rounded the Horn twice, and knew what a four months' passage is. Might she not, then, have found a kind of salt-water flavour about me that would come as a novelty to her now and awaken pleasant thoughts?

By-and-by we came to a road that had two branches, one leading to Clifton Lodge and the other to my uncle's house; and here Amelia asked Miss Hawke to accompany us home to lunch.

"I hoped you and Mr. Seymour would have lunched with *me*," said Miss Florence.

"As you please, dear," said Amelia, with the good-natured indifference to things which I have often taken notice of in fat people.

"Home," warbled the sweet girl to the resplendent creature on the box; and presently we arrived at Clifton Lodge.

The old Arabian romancers were fond of bringing young men of various social standing and princesses together, and making the princesses overwhelm the young men with favours and sweet-

meats, until the young men, bewildered by so much kindness and so much beauty, came at last to wonder whether they stood on their heels or their heads. As I followed the girls into Clifton Lodge I must say my feelings very much resembled those of the Arabian young men. I had met a young princess, and by a combination of events over which I had had no control, though I could not have marshalled them to greater advantage to myself had I had the ordering of them, I was privileged to be in her company, and enjoy her conversation and society so continuously as to make the chances by which that spell of bliss came about quite singular to remember.

Take the circumstances in their order : first, her papa was away ; then there was the meeting her on the previous night, and her stopping to dinner ; then there was the arrangement with Amelia to hear the anthem, my stepping in and asking leave to go too, the walk to the Cathedral, the sitting through the service, the drive, and now the invitation to lunch. It was all perfectly correct. I question if the most acidulated old lady living, bless her ! could find an excuse for a scowl in any point of this narrative of my meeting and acquaintance with Florence Hawke, so far. But nevertheless, this girl and I were so much together at the first start that I say there was something singular in it.

She took my cousin upstairs, and I was left alone in the drawing-room, where, after casting my eyes round the spacious apartment and surveying the costly ornaments, the resplendent chairs, and the various other objects with much wonder and without the least pleasure, I opened an album bound in silver and ivory, with Alphonso Hawke's crest (*his crest!*)—a kind of shield with something that looked like a goose perched on top of it, its wings extended and its bill cocked up as though it were asking forgiveness for its absurd posture—and looked at the photographs. Here I found correct portraits of her gracious Majesty, likewise the late Prince Consort and the Heir Apparent in Highland costume; also several persons of quality; and among these august and noble people there were scattered likenesses of the Hawke family and the most genteel of their friends. But the book was very thinly furnished. It was a show-volume-meant for visitors. The likenesses of Hawke's relations and early acquaintances and antipodean friends were, I suppose, kept in a separate book intended for the use of the family and the domestics only.

But in looking over this album I came across a lovely profile likeness of Miss Florence. It was a Paris photograph; the shadowing and light very fine, the pose perfect in grace and refinement. She was seated bending over a book, her hand to-

her forehead, and tresses of her hair delicately fringing her finger-tips. As I sat entranced the ladies entered. I was so full of the subject that I immediately exclaimed, "What an exquisite portrait this is, Miss Hawke!"

They both came up to look. When Miss Florence saw that it was her likeness she slightly smiled, her colour deepened.

"It is considered good," said she.

"It is perfect," said I rapturously. "Have you one, Amelia?"

"One of my own?" asked Amelia.

"One of these?" said I, and I pointed to the lovely portrait.

"No, Jack," answered Amelia.

"I only had a dozen," said Miss Florence, "and this, I believe, is the last of them. If you would like to have it, Amelia, you are very welcome to it, dear."

"May I extract it at once?" said I; and without waiting for permission I withdrew it tremblingly but with extraordinary care, and said, "I will put it in my pocket and keep it for you, Amelia," and so saying I pocketed it.

All this was more significant than talking. Amelia giggled, and did not know how to look nor what to say. Miss Florence, on the other hand, threw a veil of charming transparent tact over the little interlude, by coming close to the table and saying, whilst she pointed to the portraits, "That

is my father, Mr. Seymour; and that is my poor mother," and as I stooped to peer at Mr. Alphonso Hawke's features a footman announced luncheon.

Cold chicken and tongue, cutlets and claret and champagne and salad—of such was the modest repast composed, and I could not but think that the splendidly-dressed funkey who waited upon us was ashamed of the poverty of the meal. The table in its abridged form wanted at least five-and-twenty people to fill it, and I should think that seventy or eighty guests could very comfortably have dined in the great room that formed the ground floor of the largest wing of the house. The walls were crowded with pictures, whether good or bad I do not know, and the furniture was of very magnificently carved oak, the back of the sideboard being pretty nearly as tall as the room, and enriched with all sorts of cuttings.

Thought I, however old Hawke has earned his money, plenty of it he must have; and when I looked at the lovable, beautiful creature who sat at the head of the table, and whose figure was thrown into sweet relief by the handsome livery of the fellow who hung in the wake of her chair, and reflected upon the fortune she was pretty sure to step into—for so far as I had learnt there was but another child—and considered the crowds of handsome young men and high-born young men—men, who, if they had not the capacity of going forward

were capable of going back to any extent, who would be only too happy to mingle their blood with old Hawke's for the privilege of possessing his lovely daughter and his Australian sovereigns—I say that when I looked at her and thought thus, my heart sank, a gloom fell upon my spirits, and I felt disposed to curse the chance that had brought me acquainted with my uncle, and led to my visit to Clifton.

By-and-by the footman went out of the room. I was fumbling over a peach when Amelia said—quite sequentially, for the conversation led up to the remark—"Florence dear, are you glad or sorry that Mr. Morecombe is coming?"

"Now, you know, Amelia, that I don't care a snap of the finger either one way or the other," answered Miss Hawke, laughing.

"Is Mr. Morecombe a connection of yours, Miss Hawke?" said I, looking and talking innocently.

"Tell my cousin he would like to be, Florence," exclaimed Amelia, chuckling, and squeezing grapes into her mouth and looking at me with a kind of leer, as if she wished me to know she approved of my pretended ignorance.

"No, he is no connection," answered Miss Hawke very quietly. "He is a son of Sir Reginald Morecombe, a person my father has a high regard for. He is coming here on a visit. Mr. Seymour, will you please give me a peach?"

What was the meaning of the smile that flitted over her face ? Could she read in me that I was half mad to ask her if there was the faintest chance in the world of her complying with her papa's desire ? Well, I must have been an ass to suppose that she could interpret my thoughts like that. Yet my mind was so full at that moment that I could not but suspect she had caught a glimpse of a portion of what was whirling and simmering in it.

"What is young Mr. Morecombe ?" said I. "An army man ?"

"He is nothing," said Miss Hawke.

"Very much nothing at all," observed Amelia.

I waited breathless, thinking that Miss Hawke would speak in his favour.

"I am afraid he is rather a fool," said she ; whereupon I laughed at the top of my voice.

"Why were fools invented?" I exclaimed, as lively as a sparrow on a sudden. "To mitigate any spirit of discontent that might sometimes visit monkeys ? Or as standards for measuring the intellect of ladies ?"

"Why do you say that ?" cried Amelia. "Are women only fit for fools ?"

"No, no !" said I. "The women who are above fools can't be measured by them. I am speaking of women who allow fools to make love to them, and who end in marrying fools."

"A girl may marry a fool and not know he is a

fool until she finds him her husband," said Miss Hawke.

I wouldn't have contradicted her to save my life ; but for all that I didn't agree with her. A man, it is true, may prove a bigger fool after marriage to his wife than he seemed before, because his wife has had the chance of looking deeper into him ; but if he was ever a fool at all, he was a fool before his marriage, and the woman knew it.

"I should not object very much to stupid men," said Amelia, "if they were foolishly amiable and not generally conceited. I don't profess to know much about Mr. Morecombe, but so far as I have gone, what annoys me most in him is this : when he puts his glass into his eye and looks around, there can be no question that he thinks himself a person of consequence, and that he embellishes life. *He !* Oh, my dear ! whenever I meet with what papa calls a swell, I always wonder how many feet high it would be necessary to mount into the air to look down and not be able to see the noble creature."

"How terribly democratic they are in America, Mr. Seymour !" exclaimed Miss Hawke, laughing. "In Australia, you know, we reverence pedigree."

"Yes, the Australians are a loyal people ; they believe in lords, and sing 'God save the Queen,'" said I. "And don't you see, Amelia, that your notion of going into the air and losing sight of the

swell hits the man of genius too ? Would little Thomas Moore have been visible three miles down ? ”

“ Not his body, but the best part of him would,” said Miss Hawke, “ for Amelia could take the ‘ Irish Melodies ’ into the air with her.”

I should have praised this as a neat turn in anybody ; but coming from Miss Florence it sounded to me incomparably fine. I was delighted, and said it was worthy of Hook. (Why Hook ? I must have meant Hood.)

“ Pray, Miss Hawke,” said I, “ where is Flora ? ”

“ Flora ? Oh, poor dear old Flora, I am sorry to say, is not well. The housekeeper is nursing her downstairs. But you are not sorry, *are* you ? You think her vicious. Even had she been well I should not have introduced her. And yet she cannot bite. She has no teeth.”

“ You should order a false set for her,” says Amelia, with a sober face.

“ I love poor old Flora,” continued Miss Hawke, in her tender voice. [Observe ! It was delightful to hear her say “ I love.” Her lips were made to form the words, her face to look the thought expressed !] “ She was my mother’s pet, and has been mine ever since mamma died. It will grieve me when poor Flora goes ; and I simply hate the coachman for telling me this morning that he’s afraid she will not last much longer.”

"Don't let the coachman distress you," said I softly. "I have a poor opinion of coachmen as a body. They know very little. Let them stick to horses, and leave dogs alone."

"Jack, it is time to go," said Amelia, looking at the clock. "Why, Florence, your papa and Mr. Morecombe will be arriving at six o'clock and finding us still at lunch." And up she jumped.

Miss Hawke begged her not to be in a hurry: it was only half-past two. For my part I should have been willing to go on stopping until I had been turned out; but I could not stay without Amelia, and Amelia declared she must go. So my cousin went to put on her hat, and when that job—which kept me waiting twenty minutes—was performed, we bade Miss Hawke farewell, and passed out of the house with all the state that could be conferred upon us by a footman holding open the door, a butler bowing, and another fellow in livery in the distance looking on.

"I have thoroughly enjoyed my morning," said I, as we walked in the direction of my uncle's house.

"I am very glad to hear it," replied Amelia. "We want you to enjoy yourself whilst you are with us. And I hope you will not be in a hurry to go."

"You are all delightfully kind and good. This sort of life, I fear, will unfit me for lodgings in

London. I am afraid it will make me want to get married, Amelia."

"Well," says she, laughing, "you ought not to find much trouble when you do make up your mind. You are very impressionable—you will not be hard to please, will you?"

"Why do you say that? Here am I twenty-five years old, and I have never been in love yet."

"That may be," said she; "but you are in love now, aren't you?"

I coloured, hesitated, and then exclaimed, "Yes, I think I am—I am pretty sure I am. How lovely she is! how gentle! how kind! Who could help loving her?"

"That is what I mean by your being impressionable," said Amelia, laughing pleasantly. "You arrived here last evening; it is now about three o'clock, and in that time you have fallen in love."

"Well, don't make a joke of it, Amelia. If it isn't permissible to fall in love with a girl like Florence Hawke almost as fast as one can look at her, why should nature allow the emotion to exist? Eh, I think that's a puzzler, isn't it?" and I heard myself laughing harshly.

"I am not making a joke of it, Jack," answered Amelia. "I believe if I were a man I should fall in love with Florence myself. I don't mean to say that she is so *wondrously* beautiful as the gentlemen profess to find her; but she has a sweet

character, and if I were a man that is what I should like best in a wife."

"Yes, and that is exactly what I like best in Florence" (what a horrible hypocrite I was!). And then a cloud gathering upon my brow, "I wish," I mumbled moodily, "I had never seen her. I shall have her on the brain, and no good can come of it. Her father has got hold of the tiller and will steer her as he wants, and the very sweetness of character you speak of is just an assurance that she will answer her helm. Besides, what chance should *I* stand, in any case?" And with my stick I let fly at the twigs of the hedge past which we were walking.

"I think she is disposed to like you, do you know, Jack?" said Amelia.

"What put that into your head?"

"We were talking of you in the bedroom, and she said she enjoyed your frank manners. It was like going a voyage to sit with you, she said."

"Ah!"

"She also observed that the difference between a young man like Mr. Morecombe and a young man like you was the difference between the hot atmosphere of an evening party and the bright breeze of the sea-shore. No," she continued, "I'm wrong. It was I who said that. But she agreed with me so thoroughly that it was just the same as if she had said it."

"What else did she say?"

"Why," she answered, trying to remember, "I think she then changed the subject by speaking of her dog."

"May I smoke a cigar?" I asked. She gave me permission. "Can you explain," I asked, "how it is that Mr. Alphonso Hawke, if he is so very anxious to marry his daughter, both daughters I presume, to blood, should be living here instead of in London, where his means should enable him to get the class of man he wants about him?"

"You say both daughters; but Emily Hawke is never likely to marry," answered Amelia. "The poor thing is little better than an invalid. She suffers from a weak or curved spine, and her chest is affected. Periodically she visits some fashionable doctor in London, and that is why, I believe, she is away with her father now. I am sure I cannot tell why Mr. Hawke does not live in London. Perhaps he is not so very sure of being able to get the society he likes. This place agrees with him and Emily, he told papa. Besides, if Mr. Morecombe comes up to his idea of an eligible young man, then, as he has got him, and as one is enough—for we are not *Mormons* at Clifton, Jack—he may think it would only be a waste of money to live in London for the sake of getting others."

"What do you mean by *got him*, Amelia?" I rattled out. "You don't mean to say that his marriage with Miss Florence is settled?"

"I believe it is in Mr. Hawke's mind, and no doubt in young Morecombe's. But not in Florence's; she is not likely to accept a man she can ridicule."

"That's no guarantee!" I muttered. "But gracious mercy! if it is only a question of blood with Mr. Hawke, cannot he get higher than young Morecombe?"

"Yes, but he is evidently satisfied with the blood of the Morecombes."

"I wish I could spill it! I wish some one would shed it!" I exclaimed. "If the father attacks his daughter on one side and the representative of the blood of the Morecombes attacks her on the other, she must yield: she is doomed; her amiability will be her fatality. She will be crushed under the ruins of her own good nature."

"Is it not a little early for you to begin to tear your hair, Jack?" said Amelia, laughing heartily. "You really cannot have made up your mind upon the state of your heart yet. Wait a little."

"Whatever may be the state of my heart, Amelia," said I, "I have bared it to you, and you will respect the solemn secret you have beheld in it."

"Oh, certainly!"

" You will not breathe a word of this conversation to your papa or mamma ? "

" Not a syllable. There is nothing to breathe." And as she said this, with difficulty preserving her gravity, we entered the grounds of my uncle's house.

CHAPTER V.

MR. ALPHONSO HAWKE.

IT is a mistake to ask a woman not to breathe a syllable. She cannot be trusted, least of all with another person's love-secret. She can keep her own, but not yours or mine. And indeed very often she cannot keep her own. I remember a young gentleman telling me that, having fallen in love with a girl, he proposed to her in a very neat letter that had cost him nearly a quire of expensive paper. She answered by return, declining his offer, hoping he would forgive her, and that they would continue friends. She had destroyed his letter, she said; and as she did not mean to breathe a syllable of what had passed between them, she hoped he would be silent too. Meanwhile he was to be sure to come to their dance next so and so. Well, his heart having been declined, it suited him very well to be silent ; and nothing but his faith in her promise of secrecy, coupled with his anxiety to gaze on her once more, could have furnished

him with sufficient fortitude to present himself at the dance given by the young lady's mamma. The behaviour of the numerous family satisfied him that nobody knew he had proposed to the girl, and he danced in a collected and easy posture of mind. But what was the truth? He ultimately won the girl's love, and when they were married she said, "Of course, Montague, I showed your letter to papa and mamma, and my brothers and sisters, and poor Aunt Jane—you remember dear Aunt Jane?—for was it to be supposed, Montague, that I could hide such a *serious* thing as an offer of marriage from my family?"

Amelia served me in that way. She went and told Sophie that I had confessed, "Yes, my dear, *confessed*—only think!" to being deeply in love with Florence Hawke. Sophie gave the news to her mother, who handed it on to my uncle. No doubt they all pledged one another to secrecy. But my uncle could not hold his tongue; and on the evening of the day on which I had lunched with Miss Hawke, the ladies having retired to rest, and he and I being alone, sitting in the open window and smoking cigars, he spoke as follows:—

"So, my boy" (and this was the delicate way he approached the subject), "they tell me you are head over ears in love with Florence Hawke."

"Who are they?" I observed.

"All your relations," he answered. "But why

d'ye want to keep it a secret? And yet I don't know. You're right to be [sly if you're sincere; for if Hawke twigs your sentiment, stand by! But I say, Jack, how on earth can you be in love with a girl you have only met once or twice, and have only heard of during the last twenty-four hours?"

"I am sure I can't tell you," said I.

"Why, it took me eight months to make up my mind to offer for your aunt—a handsomer woman *then* than Florence is now, make no mistake about that, sir. A proper female; a lady in heart and a woman in beauty, young man."

"That she is still," said I.

"Yes, every inch of her. Eight months, I say, it took me to resolve; and here are *you* ripe in less than twenty-four hours for the parson to operate on. But this is the age of locomotives—the sixty-mile-an-hour epoch; and a correct portrait of the period should represent it as pelting before a hurricane, holding its gray hair on with both hands."

"I think you forge ahead a trifle too fast," said I. "I greatly admire Miss Hawke, and so do you." He nodded. "But when you speak of my being desperately in love you're giving a character to my admiration that I really can't say it yet possesses."

"Well, my lad," said he, "I don't know what's

in your mind, nor does it matter. But I'll tell you this : you'll be a lucky fellow if you win her. I should say she was good for ten thousand pounds, if a penny, with more to come. Moreover, she's a lady, which is a fine thing for one's friends, and a beauty, which is a fine thing for oneself. Any help I can give you, Jack, you may command. Your aunt may hang a bit in the wind, as she's got to work the sense of duty to her neighbour off her mind ; but your cousins are at your service, and with a pair of clever girls to do your love-errands you should be able to out-weather old Nick himself, where he Florence's papa."

Though I could talk as offhandedly as he, I was not without a stock of native modesty ; and we were now upon a subject which sentiment had to a certain extent consecrated, and which I felt ought to be approached hat in hand, so that I did not much care to humour my uncle's irreverent, commercial, and half-jeering allusions to it. I therefore without much trouble drew him away from the subject, and was presently splitting my sides over some capital Yankee stories he related ; though when I went to my bedroom I hung for a long half-hour over Miss Florence's photograph, and when in bed lay so great a while full of thought, that the sparrows were twittering on the trees when I fell asleep. Was I to get no rest at Clifton ?

Next morning I took my cousins for a drive in

the phaeton, and when we were fairly under way I said to Amelia :—

“ Do you remember promising not to breathe a syllable ? ”

“ Of what ? ” asked she.

“ Of our talk yesterday when we returned from Clifton Lodge.”

“ Yes ; and I kept my word. Sophie asked questions, particularly if you were not in love with Florence, and I said yes, you were.”

“ And why shouldn’t we know ? ” exclaimed good-natured Sophie. “ We are naturally interested in you and in Florence too.”

I had to thank her for this, which of course put an end to my reproaches.

“ By-the-by, Jack,” said Amelia, “ I forgot to ask you for Florence’s portrait, which you very kindly put into your pocket to keep for me.”

“ I’ll go on keeping it for you,” I replied. “ You may trust me ; it will be quite safe.”

Both the girls laughed, and Amelia said :—

“ I did not tell you, Sophie, that when Jack was admiring Florence’s portrait she turned to me and asked me if I would like it. Do you think she was sure it would find its way through me to Jack or through Jack to me ? Upon my word, she is a deep little thing.”

“ Is she a flirt ? ” I asked, not much relishing my cousin’s applause of her.

"If she were should I tell you?" answered Amelia, laughing loudly. "No, no; there is such a thing as *esprit des corps* among women: we may sneer at one another among ourselves, but right-minded females never expose the sex's infirmities to the common enemy."

"Besides, Jack," says Sophie, "no girl is supposed to know whether another is a flirt or not. It is for men to make the discovery."

Well, to be sure all this was very twopenny talk—the chatter of three young relations driving along a road in a phaeton; but it pleased and amused me. I found that these girls enjoyed conversing on the subject of love, and that they were quite disposed to encourage me to make a fool of myself over Miss Hawke. There are women who like to set people quarrelling with one another, and there are women who like to set people making love to one another. My cousins were of this order, and their papa perhaps knew their peculiarity when he spoke of them as a couple of clever girls, willing to run on any errands I might want to put them to.

And, upon my word, if I were a girl I should think that the next best fun to having a sweetheart is to act as factotum to a pair of lovers; to enjoy the confidence of both; to patch up damaged feelings; to convey letters, and see the comedy, as I may say, from the wings instead of from the front. But it is a woman's business, and to perform her

part to her own and the satisfaction of others, she not only requires plenty of leisure, but she must be emotional if not hysterical, and exceedingly amiable; nor, perhaps, can she be held absolutely qualified for the arduous post unless she is able to show that she has been in love herself, and knows what blighted feelings are.

We returned home at half-past twelve, and as I drove up to the door I saw my uncle walking under the trees with a tall man wearing a beard, his upper lip shaved.

"It's Mr. Hawke!" said Amelia; and when the girls alighted they went up to him and shook hands. I followed when the groom was near enough to catch the reins I flung to him, and my uncle introduced me. Mr. Hawke made a very stately bow. This was evidently the first he had heard of me; and when he regained his ramrod erectness he scrutinized me with as keen a pair of eyes as were ever levelled at a youth. He was a tolerably good-looking man, tall and well dressed. He was certainly very different from the burly colonial I had somehow pictured him. He carried a very grave expression of face, and the skirts of his coat being long and his beard hiding the furniture of his neck, he might have been mistaken for a clergyman. A pair of gold eye-glasses dangled upon his ample surface of waistcoat, a large diamond flashed upon one hand that was un-

gloved, and in the other hand was a stout cane adorned with a heavy gold knob. I noticed that he spoke slowly, with a degree of deliberation that was both tiresome and disturbing, as it suggested not only a solicitude as to his choice of words, but misgivings as to his capacity of delivering them when selected.

Sophie asked after his daughter Emily.

"Thank you, Miss Seymour, she is as well as we have a right to expect. Sir Timothy Tomson thinks that no change of air is at present necessary. The journey home fatigued her—aw—poor thing, but a night's rest has, I am happy to say, restored her." And then addressing me, "What do you think of Clifton, sir? Is this your first—aw—your first visit?"

"It is," I replied. "I only arrived the night before last; but what I have seen delights me."

"And mind you, Mr. Hawke," says my uncle, "my nephew Jack's opinion is not to be despised, for he has visited Sydney Harbour."

"Oh, you know Sydney?—indeed!" exclaimed the old fellow, as if my knowing Sydney rather disconcerted him. "Pray how do you know Sydney?"

"As a sailor, sir."

"Oh, as a sailor! Yes, just so. You will not—aw—have much acquaintance with it. My recollection is that sailors are only allowed to

go ashore—I believe—aw—that is the expression—to go ashore at night, as they have to work all day.”

“Quite right,” said I; “I see that you know something about the nautical calling.”

“Not much, not much, indeed,” he replied, never relaxing his distressing gravity, and speaking as if on the whole any knowledge of the nautical calling was calculated to lead to social prejudice: “having lived in Australia I have—aw—had necessarily to cross the ocean to reach England, and have had opportunities of inspecting well—aw—perhaps not of inspecting—of witnessing—”

“In short,” cut in my uncle unceremoniously, “you have seen enough of Jack’s life to know something about it?”

“Aw—yes,” replied Mr. Hawke, giving a little scowl round to let us understand that he had been at no loss for words. “You didn’t, perhaps,” continued he, addressing me, “know Sir Wilkinson Smith at Sydney?”

“No,” said I.

“Nor his chawming lady? Who, by the way, Mr. Seymour,” speaking to my uncle, “turns out to be a connection of Lord Wear, my friend Sir Reginald Morecombe’s cousin.”

“We should call that a coincidence in Canada,” said my uncle, giving me a look. “By the way,

Mr. Hawke, have you brought Mr. Morecombe along with you to Clifton?"

Mr. Hawke answered yes, and that he and Florence were out riding, a piece of news that caused Sophie to steal a peep at me, whilst it excited in the depths of my soul an evil wish that the fellow would break his neck before he got home.

We stood all five of us conversing for some time under the trees. It did not take me long to discover that Mr. Alphonso Hawke was a pompous old bore, with an early training and history of which he was ashamed, and to the veneering of which he was devoting his declining years. I was struck by his way of speaking, the cautious manner in which he groped along with his tongue, saying aw, and ah, merely to enable him to pause and make sure, and the fine airs he put on (which he may have seen and admired in Sir Wilkinson Smith and his chawming lady, a connection of the Morecombes) when he addressed my cousins. His want of ease was the most harassing part of him. He was indeed one of those men to whom you long to say, "For goodness sake try *not* to be genteel, and pray cease to act as a person of breeding. Drop an h, sir, for the comfort of your friends, now and then. Kindly be vulgar and natural."

At last he went away, declining my uncle's

invitation to stop to lunch with a large and portly wave of the hand, and a smile that exposed what I suspected then and know now to have been a splendid set of false teeth. He gave the ladies an immense bow as he quitted them, and I watched with an emotion, almost of awe, the solemnity of his tread and the full-blown dignity of his consequential carriage as he walked by my uncle's side to the gate.

"Well, Jack," said my uncle, returning, and looking at me with a grin, "what d'ye think of your future father-in-law?"

"Hush, papa! for gracious goodness sake," cried Amelia in a terrified voice, casting her eyes in the direction in which old Hawke had disappeared.

"Tut, tut," said my uncle, "he's out of hearing, silly."

"He fits the character you gave him to a hair," said I; "he is a prig."

"Ay, a prig," exclaimed my uncle: "but isn't he a fine specimen of one? isn't he worth knowing as a prig? You're not going to meet with such a sample as that every day, my hearty. May I be shivered if the sight of him alone isn't worth a long journey."

"Really, papa," said Sophie remonstratively, "he is our friend, dear. He is Florence's father. If we cannot speak well of him, let us say nothing."

"True," said I, "he is Florence's papa; we must speak well of him."

"Sophie, my love," said my uncle with fine gravity, "let us, as the moralist says, clear our minds of cant. Who would care to have, who would be bothered with acquaintances, if the knowing them were conditional on never saying anything ill-natured behind their backs? Do you think Hawke don't sneer at *me*? Do you suppose that he doesn't ridicule my wideawake, the cut of my boots, my indifference to the aristocracy as lords and ladies—not, Jack, as men and women? No, I can respect honest people even when they *are* titled. But though Hawke sneers at me, he asks me to dine with him: and though I laugh at his cheap pretensions, I accept his invitation and return it."

"It's the way of the world, Sophie," said I. "But I own that Mr. Hawke is a bigger disappointment than I expected. How the dickens came his most lovely daughter to be a relative of his?"

"I say, Jack," cried my uncle rather maliciously, "did you hear him say that Florence and young Morecombe were out riding? Man, you must keep your weather eye lifting. Don't let this be a stern-chase, for the pretty little craft will have been boarded by the fellow who's already abreast of her before you can come up with her."

"Pray don't make my admiration of the girl too significant," said I, not liking this banter at all.

"If Morecombe boards her, it will be because she allows him to do so. And if I don't overhaul her, it may be because I reckon my spars more valuable than the chase's capture."

"Don't talk Greek!" exclaimed Sophie, who had listened eagerly. "What with boarding and overhauling and stern-chasing and such stuff, it is impossible to find out your meaning."

"There is no meaning to find out," said I. And here my aunt stood up in the window and called out that lunch was ready.

CHAPTER VI.

A LITTLE DINNER AT CLIFTON LODGE.

SOME days after this we went to dine at Clifton Lodge. My going fell out in this way.

Miss Hawke called one morning to ask the Seymours to dine *en famille* on such and such an evening. I had taken my uncle's little mare for a canter, and when I returned and heard that Miss Hawke had called, I could have pulled a handful of hair out of my head with vexation. It was a week since I had set eyes on her. In vain had I sneaked out when nobody was looking, and hung about the roads which I thought she was bound to pass along, whether riding or driving or walking. To no purpose, I say. And then all on a sudden she calls and I miss her !

However, I smothered my feelings, and asked in a collected voice the reason of her visit. It was Sophie to whom I put this question, and we were alone.

“ She called to ask us to dinner.”

"Oh indeed!" said I, brightening up. "What's the date?"

Sophie named it.

"Did she bring any news?" said I. "Anything fresh going forward at Clifton Lodge?"

"Oh, she brought no news," says Sophie.

"Nothing about young Morecombe? She'd tell you, wouldn't she, if he had proposed?"

"She'd tell me, I believe, if she had accepted him," she answered, "but I don't think she will accept him—at least, I hope she won't."

I plucked at my bit of a moustache—there was not enough of it to de-sailorize my countenance—and said: "Mr. Hawke is very polite to invite me. When I met him the other day I couldn't help fancying that he eyed me as if I might be a youth that would admire his daughter: and I suppose admiration for her in any other man than Mr. Morecombe would be worse than poison to the old gentleman."

"To be candid, Jack," says Sophie, with an air of reluctance in her gentle manner, "Florence did not include you—I mean she did not mention your name. She asked mamma and papa and Amelia and me."

"Oh!" said I.

"But it doesn't in the least signify," continued she. "It was a pure oversight on her part. Of course you'll go?"

"Go!" said I. "Go to Jericho, you mean."

What ! go where I am not asked ? Why, I'd rather hang myself up by the neck until I was dead, otherwise what mercy should I expect for my soul ? ”

“ Nonsense,” said Sophie. “ You will go.”

Upon my word I was so angry, so disappointed, that I was ungallant enough to wish that my affectionate cousin had been a man, merely to ease my mind by telling her I would see her, etc. Observing my temper and vexation—and I believe this did more to open her kind eyes to the state of my heart than had I sat down and indited volumes about it—she dropped the subject and so did I, so far as words went : but I very well remember carrying it into the grounds, up into a corner, into a summer arbour, where, armed with a large pipe, I turned it over, kicked it, ground it under heel, and, as I actually endeavoured to make myself believe, buried the mutilated thing along with the imbecile sentiment that had kept me feverish and foolish ever since the hour I had first entered my uncle's house.

Of course I was unreasonable. What right had I to expect to be included in the invitation to dine ? Who was *I* that she should trouble herself even to remember that such a person existed when I was out of sight ? And yet I felt that it would have done me good to have expended myself in an Irish riot, for the sake and pleasure of knocking anybody over the head. Was her nature perfidious ? Was

all her talk about Mr. Morecombe being a fool and the like fudge ? It was ; I say, I feared it was, and I ground my heel into the soil of the summer arbour.

Well, in this posture of mind was I sitting, smoking and writhing, when I heard Sophie calling “ Jack ! Jack ! ”

“ Halloo ! ” I grumbled.

“ Where are you, Jack ? ” she cried.

“ Here,” said I, and I went out of the arbour that she might see me.

She came running along, red with heat and radiant with pleasure, and flourished a little square of gray paper. I saw the gilt edge of it sparkle, and observed that it bore the creases of a cocked-hat note.

“ Read that, you foolish mope ! ” says she ; and she put the letter into my hand. It was as fragrant as jessamine ; it was adorned with a crest in blue and gold, and the crest embodied a goose with its bill cocked up ; the paper was ribbed and thick, delightful to feel—a truly lovable thing to handle. The handwriting was clear and decisive : it might have passed for a man’s. Thus ran the missive :—

“ DEAREST SOPHIE,

“ When I arrived home after calling upon you, it *flashed* upon me that I had omitted to

ask you to bring your cousin, Mr. Jack Seymour, next Thursday evening. I am sure I cannot account for this foolish and most *unintentional* omission, unless I put it down to my habit of thinking of your family as consisting of four only. I am sorry to say that poor Flora is much *worse*.

“Yours affectionately,
“FLORENCE HAWKE.

“P.S.—Do not let your cousin know that I forgot him.”

“There,” said Sophie, as I looked up from the letter, “you can pin that to her photograph and keep it.”

A dark suspicion entered my mind. Had Sophie written to ask her to invite me? had she requested her to write as if the after-thought were her own? No: it needed but very little reflection to see that there had not been time enough to admit of such a stratagem. It was a genuine letter, and yet I would not appear too well pleased either.

“How do you know that I want to keep it?” said I, dangling the note.

“Then tear it up,” said Sophie, with a laugh of bland defiance.

“That wouldn’t be polite,” I replied. “I never act impulsively,” and so saying I put it in my pocket.

"Of course *now* you will join us?" said Sophie.

"Why should I? don't you relish dignity in a connection? She was not polite to forget me, and there is really a limit to forgiveness," said I, in a mode that still simmered, though I admit that the fires were drawn.

"Well," said Sophie, "you have Florence's invitation: she cannot do more than ask you, although I believe men would like women to go on their knees to them even when they *granted* favours, not to mention *receiving* them; and I am quite sure, Jack, that you will do the thing that best pleases you," and she turned to leave me.

Her speech was made painfully sarcastic by her emphasis on the words *granted* and *receiving*, and sarcasm in a fat, affectionate, amiable woman falls on a man's intelligence like a box on the ear falls on the head. I seized her hand.

"Dear Sophie—I'm an ass," I exclaimed. "I have allowed my feelings—her omission of my name, do you see—the sort of liking she seemed to show for me—in fact, I ought to have stopped in London."

My cousin melted like a snowflake on a river, one moment white, though I cannot say that at the next she was gone for ever.

"No, Jack," said she. "You wrong yourself. There is nothing wonderful in your liking, even in your loving, Florence Hawke. She likes you—she

told Amelia so. Why shouldn't her liking become love? You must not misjudge her. Suppose she purposely omitted your name in her invitation? it might have been from fear of her papa. But look how honest she is! when she gets home she remembers the omission with pain, says, 'No! I will defy papa in this matter,' and she sits down and writes the letter you have in your pocket. How can you sneer at her?"

"*Sneer!*" I shouted.

"I mean, how can you talk about your dignity? Poor girl! You know she stands alone. She has to cope with her father's wishes, and the attentions of the wretched creature her papa wants her to marry. No, Jack; if I were you I should feel grateful for the spirit that prompted her to write that letter, and I should certainly try to please her by making her understand how deeply you admire her courage—which you can only do by dining at Clifton Lodge on Thursday."

"Say no more, Sophie," cried I abjectly. "I shall dine, trust me."

She gave me a kindly nod and went away, rather hurriedly, I thought; perhaps to conceal her mirth, but in that particular period of my life I was a very suspicious man, as what youth is not who believes he is in love? When she was out of sight I drew forth the letter, read it over five or six times, kissed the signature, and perpetrated several

extravagances of a like kind. I had it by heart in a very short time, and went on repeating sentence after sentence in the hope of finding a deeper meaning than lay on the surface. The passage that pleased me best was the postscript : "Do not let your cousin know that I forgot him." It showed that her dog was not the last thought in her mind when she wrote.

I look back sometimes at myself, ensconced in that summer-house reading Miss Hawke's letter, and putting it to my lips and acting like a Frenchman in love in a stage play. That particular recollection somehow makes all that followed so queer, so romantic, so wild to me as I view the incidents now, that there are times when I can hardly persuade myself that what I took part in was not a portion of another life, like one of those fancies which sometimes seize one, of having acted or done something or undergone some experience in another sphere of being in which one flourished before one was born. But let me fire away, for at this rate we shall never get out of Clifton and afloat.

Thursday evening came, and in all my time I never shaved myself with keener solicitude nor dressed myself with livelier anxiety. Will it be credited that I actually kept the ladies waiting? Think of a young fellow who for years had been accustomed to tumble out of his bunk and bundle

on deck a couple of minutes after the cry of "Eight bells! d'ye hear the news below there, sleepers?" had harshly thundered down the hatchway, who thought himself fortunate if he could get a good wash-down once a week, and who would roll into his clothes without taking thought of his appearance—think of him, I say, debasing his old sea-traditions by a trick of vile coxcombray! Yes, I positively kept my aunt and cousins waiting, so that my uncle was obliged to come to my door and beat upon it, and shout "Jack! damme man, it's not a dance but a dinner, d'ye hear? and it's not polite to be late when you're asked to dine."

Of course I rushed out and profusely apologized, declaring that my watch was wrong, and so forth; but my uncle would not have that. "No, no," says he; "it isn't your watch that's out; it's another piece of mechanism that's gone wrong," and he smote himself upon his breast, and winked at me with all his might.

"You look very nice, Mr. Jack," said my aunt; she always gave me the Mister.

It was the first time they had seen me in tails, and upon my word I think I may say without affectation that the dress-coat, shiny boots, white tie and lavender kid gloves, in which I had anxiously clothed myself, made me a very tolerable figure. My uncle was in black, and wore an open

frock coat. He began to inveigh against the waiter's costume, as he styled the dress I had figged myself out in. "It may please those who like it," said he; "but you'll never catch me in a garment that's neither a jacket nor a coat. What? Sir, the tailor who invented that dress had an improper mind. If I am to let the world know what sort of figure I possess, give me tights at once. Let me dance in shorts and a jersey."

My aunt made faces at him, and tried to change the subject by bidding me take notice of the moon—or what there was of it; did it betoken wet? she wondered. (We were in the carriage, and "rowing along," as Pat says; there were five of us, and a tight fit it was for me between my two cousins). But my uncle would take no hints. He went on abusing tail-coats until his denunciations were cut short by the carriage stopping at Clifton Lodge.

We were punctual enough: half-past seven. A most lovely evening it was, full of dew and fragrance, with a noble sunset in the west, and fitter for a ramble among the hedges than a guzzling match among hot soups and meats. As I followed my cousins into the hall my heart beat a trifle faster than usual. It was not only that I was to meet the girl that had taken sovereign command of my thoughts; I was going to find her in the company of the fellow her father had chosen

for her, and whom, by importunities and the peculiar kind of moral pressure which fond parents know how to exert on their beloved children whilst something they want done remains undone, he would ultimately, no doubt, induce or compel her to marry.

The footman flung open the drawing-room door, and announced us, and in we went. We found Mr. Hawke and his two daughters alone. With winning and delightful grace (*of course*, I always praise her, you say: but she deserved it, I tell you) Miss Florence received us, kissed Sophie and Amelia, but I could not help fancying there was a little timidity in the way in which she shook hands with me. Had Sophie told her that she had shown me her letter, and that I had stored it away along with her picture? Upon my word, it is impossible to tell not only what girls do, but what they don't tell one another.

"Let me introduce you to my sister," said she, and she led me up to Miss Emily Hawke, whose invalidism was sufficiently defined by her wan face. She would be about seventeen years old, and she had old Hawke's features attenuated by ill health, and refined by the circumstance of her not belonging to old Hawke's sex. My aunt was at her side, full of sympathy and questions. So I went over to Mr. Hawke and my uncle, leaving Miss Florence deep in conversation with my cousins, who I could

hear exclaiming "Oh!" "Poor thing!" "How dreadful!" and so forth.

Our host was in full puff, silk waistcoat, velvet collar to his tail-coat, plenty of jewellery, highly scented, and looking larger and more portly and consequential than I had first found him. He was telling my uncle that Sir Hugo Perch and her ladyship, Sir Hugo's wife—"a connection of the Battleabbeys, Mr. Seymour—chawming people"—were to have come to dinner, but that in consequence of something or other, they—aw—were obliged at the last moment, etc.

"So we shall be quite 'ong famille,'" says he, glancing from my uncle's coat to mine. "Indeed, rather more so than I had anticipated, for I—aw—I regret to say a most painful, really a most painful, incident happened this afternoon. You—aw—you remember my daughter Florence's——"

Here he was interrupted by my cousins and Miss Hawke joining us.

"Oh, papa!" cried Sophie, "what do you think? Florence's poor, dear, darling old Flora is dead."

"Dead!" ejaculated my uncle, not quite knowing what else to say.

"Worse than dead," said Amelia. "Killed, papa!"

"Killed!" cried I; on which methought Mr. Hawke looked at me as much as to say, "What the deuce is it to *you*, sir?"

"I was about to tell the story," exclaimed the old gentleman, posing himself in such a way as to make him seem all waistcoat. "It's a doubly unfortunate circumstance. It deprives my daughter—a little precipitately, but that—aw—that is all; a little before its time, my love," continued he with a bland wave of his hand to her, "of an old and attached friend, and ourselves—aw—of the pleasure of my friend Sir Reginald Morecombe son's company at dinner this evening."

I pricked up my ears, stealing meanwhile earnest glances at Miss Florence, who looked, I thought, now that I could take a good peep at her, as if she had been crying.

"It happened in this way," continued Mr. Hawke. "Flora had followed my daughter upstairs; but—aw—being exceedingly infirm—her age, Florence, could certainly not be less than sixteen years, and—aw—short of breath, she failed, I presume, to reach the landing, and lay down upon one of the steps, to await her mistress's return. Whilst the animal was there Mr. Morecombe came from his—aw—his bedroom, and, not observing the dawg, stepped upon it, which, I regret to say, caused him to roll down at least half a dozen stairs; but providentially he caught hold of the banister and saved himself from—aw—from serious injury. As it was, he severely sprained his ankle, which necessitated his removal to his bedroom, where he now lies."

"And in stepping upon Flora he trod what remained of the poor beast's breath out of her, I suppose?" said my uncle, keeping his gravity nobly; for, upon my word, I believe, had I caught the least shadow of a grin upon his face, I should have exploded.

"Yes," cried Miss Hawke, with the tears standing in her beautiful eyes; "papa thinks only of Mr. Morecombe. When poor Flora was looked at she was stone dead; and will anybody believe that Mr. Morecombe did not see her, or that he did not tread with all his weight out of spite?" she added, making a little passionate gesture with her hand.

"Is he of a naturally cruel disposition?" asked my uncle of Mr. Hawke, with a little droop in his right eyelid, which I took as meant for me.

"Cruel! certainly not," exclaimed the old gentleman in his amplest manner, and expanding his chest as he spoke. "Had he seen the poor dawg he could of course have avoided her. Can you suppose, Florence, that—aw—that he would deliberately sprain his ankle? Yet you are bound, my love, to presume this if you affirm that he acted out of malice. Ree-diculous!"

A footman announced dinner. Mr. Hawke gave his arm to my aunt, and I heard him tell my uncle to take Miss Hawke in; but my uncle, instead of offering his arm to Miss Florence, gave it to Miss Emily, and left her sister to me. He thrust his

tongue in his cheek as he glanced at me over his shoulder. Heaven bless him ! There never was a finer creature. With Miss Florence on my arm I followed the others, forming the tail of the procession. The table was so plentifully covered with flowers and tall silver candlesticks that Mr. Hawke was, from his position at the head of it, unable to see the order in which we had arrived until we were all seated. But what could he say when he saw me alongside Miss Hawke and my uncle next to Miss Emily ? His business was to ask a blessing, which he did with his eyes closed and his hands locked, and when that was over my uncle began to talk to him, whilst one of the flunkeys served out soup at a side table and the others handed it round.

“ I am very sorry for your sake,” said I to Miss Florence, “ to hear of the death of poor old Flora. It would have served your father’s friend right had he broken his neck—that is, if he stepped on the dog purposely because she happened to be in the road.”

“ Flora was my poor mother’s pet,” she replied. “ She has been a constant companion of mine for years, and it bitterly grieves me to think that the poor animal should have been killed at the last, and cruelly killed, even admitting that Mr. Morecombe did tread upon her by accident. But we’ll say no more about it, Mr. Seymour ; I don’t want you to think me affected.”

Here Mr. Hawke began to speak about the dog in a loud voice.

"The peculiarity, Mrs. Seymour, of the old animal was—aw—was its capacity of fondness. Some years ago it brought a cat out of the water where the thing was—aw—was drowning. Florence nursed the cat and made it well, and the dawg grew so attached to the cat and the cat to the dawg that they would—aw—I assure you, take walks together. The cat was ultimately lost; I believe—aw—it strayed. Flora greatly missed it, and until age rendered her imbecile she could never hear the noise which cats are in the habit of making at night without considerable agitation, a circumstance that people who—aw—study dawgs might think affecting."

Considering that I wanted to preserve a solemn face, that Miss Hawke might believe my sympathy with her loss sincere—which it certainly was—I say that the old fellow's story, or rather the manner and tone in which he delivered it, was as severe a trial as ever befel me. However, it did not take me long to recover; the having Miss Hawke alongside of me soon rendered me desperately serious and sentimental. I knew old Hawke was looking; I had not the least doubt he was extremely annoyed that his daughter should be sitting next a young fellow whose admiration for his lovely companion he could not and would not

disguise ; but I did not care a brass farthing for his thoughts. It was a magnificent pleasure for me, an immense delight, to be in her company again after the separation of a week, during which I had hung about like a turnpike tramp in the hope of catching sight of her. Besides, could I doubt that she was pleased with me as a companion ? She could not help talking of Flora, and heartily did I bless the ghost of the dead brute as a bond of sympathy between its adorable mistress and me ; and Flora led her to speak of Australia, and Australia set me gabbling about my sea experiences, and I told her one or two thrilling tales of salt water—of a ship on fire, of a black man overboard in the Doldrums fighting with a shark, and such things—and either related them so well, or she was so anxious to be interested, that we seemed to forget that the footmen were waiting to remove our plates, that there were others beside ourselves at table, and that old Hawke was watching us from behind the silver candlesticks (though of course we were not supposed to notice anything of that kind), until on looking up once I caught Miss Emily staring at us, and then glance at her papa, a circumstance that made me cautious for about one minute and a half, after which I was deep in stories, questions, conversation again.

You will suppose from this that I did not lack encouragement. In many things I was a conceited

young fellow in those days. I believe I was tolerably good-looking; I considered that I was not destitute of intellect; there was not a man living, on or off the stage, whom I should have been afraid to challenge to a dancing match, from a waltz to a hornpipe; I reckoned in such songs as "Tom Bowling," "The Anchor's Weighed," and "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep," I could deliver as honest a note as ever a sailor's lungs could find wind for (though I never would sing before ladies); but I was not such a fop as not to have been able to tell in a moment whether my company was unwelcome to Miss Florence, nor such a blunderhead as not to have straightway hauled off from her under a press of canvas had such a discovery been made by me. If lively interest in my talk, if comparative neglect of the rest of the company, if real earnestness in her manner when earnestness was most acceptable to me, if an occasional sideways peep at me as if the view was rather to her taste—if such things in a girl may be accepted as encouraging symptoms by the young fellow she is alongside of, then I am strictly within the truth when I say that all this and a good deal more, much too nice and subtle for the pen to determine, composed Miss Hawke's bearing, manners, behaviour, speech to me that evening at her papa's dining-table. And shall I omit reference to the unspeakable relish afforded this delightful communion by the reflection that

young Morecombe was abed upstairs with a sprained ankle—an ankle, I say, sprained, to put the fact squarely, by tumbling over Miss Hawke's sensibilities.

"A fig for old Hawke!" I cried to myself; and as the old gentleman's excellent dry champagne mingled with my blood and coursed through my youthful veins, I grew more and more indifferent to the looks of astonishment and annoyance I would catch him throwing at us, and more and more ardent in my behaviour to Miss Hawke; so that I may plainly assert that if I had come to that table up to my neck in love, I had floundered clean out of soundings long before the ladies withdrew.

Well, when they rose at last I nearly pitched over my chair to hold open the door; but not for a small fortune would I have missed doing that same, for as Miss Hawke passed she just raised her eyes to mine with a little smile; it was the briefest glance in the world, yet had it been a prolonged gaze I could not have found more meaning in it. My heart fell to beating as if I had received a fright; and I stood holding on to the door-handle some moments after the last of the ladies had passed out, rendered as I may suppose temporarily incapable of employing my intelligence by the transport of wonder and passion those sweet eyes had kindled in me.

I returned to the table, and observed my uncle

casting glances around as if in search of something to smoke. Old Hawke sat cold and hard in his place ; there was no invitation for me to draw my chair close ; he mechanically pointed to the decanters and named their contents with an expression of face as if he wished us all at the devil.

" You're not a smoker, I believe, Mr. Hawke ? " said my uncle.

" No, I am not," he replied, " but I know you are ; " and he called to one of his men to put a box of cigars on the table. My uncle and I fired up, as why should we not, since the cigars were there to be smoked ? and I do not know that I enjoyed Mr. Hawke's capital tobacco the less because I noticed that he studiously avoided addressing me or even looking at me.

After we had been sitting in this manner about ten minutes, Mr. Hawke begged my uncle's pardon for leaving him for a few moments : he was anxious to see how Mr. Morecombe did ; he should be sorry that his friend Sir Reginald Morecombe's son should feel himself neglected.

" Not very polite, Jack, to leave us, even for Sir Reginald Morecombe's son," said my uncle when Mr. Hawke was gone ; " but squatting is a calling for which one must make large allowances. Have you enjoyed your dinner ? "

" Very much," I replied.

" I am glad to hear that," says he gravely ; " and

whilst it lasts, my lad, I should go on enjoying it up to the hilt ; for I calculate it'll be the only blow-out —I don't say the only blow-up—you'll get at Clifton Lodge."

"I am afraid that's pretty plain," said I.

"You can't blame Hawke," continued my uncle. "Why, confound you ! you and Florence have been as thick as thieves this evening ; never saw such a hobnobbing in my life. Have you made her in love with you ? You turned the old man into stone ; he was like a statue, and could do nothing but look. If he don't cut me and your aunt for this at once, he'll drop us presently. You bet."

"I hope not," said I.

"You bet. But d'ye think I shall go into mourning ? We'll invite him to dinner by way of revenge next week, and if he accepts I give you leave to shave my head. And, man ! wasn't your getting Miss Hawke to take into dinner neatly managed ? How was I to know which Miss Hawke he meant ?" and he laughed at the top of his voice.

"Aren't you sorry Mr. Morecombe has sprained his ankle ?" said I.

"Very," he replied. "If I'd foreseen this disaster I'd have brought a few pockethandkerchiefs with me."

"Fancy squeezing the life out of the dog ! How happy he must feel as he lies forking his leg up and cursing at it !" said I, turning over the fancy

and relishing it and garnishing it with my imagination.

“Jack,” exclaimed my uncle, looking at me with one eye half closed, “d’ye know, if you have a mind to win the girl, I’m disposed to stake a sum of money on your chances. Mind, I don’t believe you’d ever get her dad’s consent. You’d have to bolt with her; it would have to be the old rope-ladder business, the midnight chaise or express, his worship the registrar early in the morning, the regular Rosa Matilda and Anna Maria kind of thing, against all which I solemnly caution you. But what I’d be willing to wager on is, that with a few more opportunities you’ll bring Miss Florence to listen—ay, and to like it—whilst you pour your cheap poetry into her ears. And I hope, young man,” said he, deepening his voice and opening his half-closed eye, and speaking very earnestly indeed, “that unless you are absolutely sincere in your feelings you’ll sheer off from her before you begin to make her think of you.”

“ My dear uncle—— ” I began.

“ Hear me out! ” cried he. “ She is a sweet woman, and I must have her approached with immense honesty. I’ll allow no flirting. You must not drop the game by-and-by to consider whether it is worth the candle. Oh, yes ! I can see what’s in your mind. Your admiration for her fills you with astonishment at my language. But

you are twenty-five, and at twenty-five the human character is like sand, and the loveliest fabric of sentiment that can be constructed upon it, cemented by dreams, decorated with the sparkling gems of imagination, and radiant with the light that Wordsworth speaks of in his noble ode, may settle and sink out of sight in a few hours like an old collier on the Goodwin Sands."

"My dear uncle——" I began once more.

"There must be no tomfoolery," he continued. "Not," giving me a bow, "that I doubt you. No, sir; you are my brother Tom's son; you have been a sailor, and I know how to value those two things. But do not go, I say, and make love to Forence Hawke, and get her to fall in love with you; do not go and shove yourself in the way of her papa's wishes, and deprive her of a man who, ass as I think him, might, for all that you can tell, turn out a very tolerable husband, unless you are as certain that you can count upon your impasioned sincerity and devotion for the rest of your natural life, as surely as I can count at this moment upon finding gold in my pocket by feeling for it."

This was rather staggering talk to me. What did he mean? That I wasn't a man of honour? That I was a cockney flirt down at Bristol for a holiday, trying to make a fool of the girl I had fallen in love with and literally adored? I was

turning over an answer in my mind when he started off afresh.

"I should speak to you in the same fashion if you had fallen in love with one of your cousins. You are without a father, Jack, and as an uncle I have a right to talk to you. There's nothing in life that disgusts and angers me more than a male flirt: a creature who pretends to fall in love, makes a girl fond of him, and then drops her. There's no halter long enough for such malignant baboons. A woman is always an object to be reverenced. She has emotions we men could not fathom—no, not if all the deep-sea lead-lines in the world were spliced together to sound her with. Her love is not like ours, a thing apart: you know the noble lines written by a scamp? When it is a woman's heart that is to be approached, my cry is, 'Hats off and hands off! Show your respect, for you are on holy ground. And prove your honesty, as the Scotchman does before paying money, by pausing to tak' a thocht.'"

"Do you imagine I am *flirting* with Miss Hawke?" cried I.

"No, sir; I believe you are head over ears in love with her. Keep so to the end; keep head over ears though the end be fixed when the blast announcing the crack o' doom shall be heard. Don't go and scramble out after you have hauled her in. Jack, don't you know, you miserable sailor

man you ! that love is too often mere electroplate with men ? Wear brings the silver off. With women it is all pure metal right through. Remember that ; and in hauling away at your heart in order to get it out of its moorings and offer it to this girl, see that there is nothing of Birmingham and Sheffield in the gift ; d'ye take me ? For if it is only coating that makes it look bright and massy, keep it where it is, otherwise ye'll be committing felony, cheating as badly as any rascally tradesman who palms off pinchbeck for gold. Hush ! ”

The door opened and Mr. Hawke stalked in. My uncle immediately inquired after Mr. Morecombe, but I took no heed of the old gentleman's replies. In truth I felt half stunned by the broadside that had been poured into me. And yet it was full of flattery too ; it was like telling me that I could win the girl if I chose, but that I was not to attempt to do so without first feeling sure that I was sincere in my desire to win her. My half-smoked cigar hung idly and extinguished between my fingers whilst I looked foolishly from Mr. Hawke to my uncle, pretending that I was interested in their talk, though I did not attend to a single word that was said. Presently our host, addressing me abruptly, but speaking with his dreadful formality and pomp of delivery, exclaimed, “ Will you finish your cigar, Mr. Seymour, or have you—aw—had enough ? The ladies, I fear, will be wondering at

—aw—our absence?" On this I stood up and followed them to the drawing-room.

The ladies formed a group at one end of the room, though Miss Hawke sat a little apart listening to the others. I went up to her at once, not in the least caring how Mr. Hawke might relish this renewal of my attention to his daughter; for I was now rendered utterly defiant, not only by being deeply in love, but by the perception that Mr. Hawke was never likely to again ask me to his house, and that therefore it would not signify an atom whether I dissembled or not. I asked if she had heard how Mr. Morecombe was; she said no. I told her that her father had been upstairs to see him, and added: "He is a very lucky young gentleman to be so highly esteemed by your father." She smiled, but made no observation.

"I am afraid," said I, taking a squint at the old fellow, who was talking to my aunt, "I should never be able to reach up to Mr. Morecombe's moral stature in Mr. Hawke's opinion. Is it because my head is not so well shaped as his, or because I have not his honesty?" She watched me with a partly-amused, partly-questioning expression. "But neither brains nor characters, I am afraid, are of much use in these days. Tell me what is most liked, Miss Hawke? what is the most successful? what do *you* value most?"

"Perfect sincerity, Mr. Seymour: the very rarest thing in the world," she answered.

I was struck by this reply, that patly followed what my uncle had said. One might have sworn she had overheard him.

"When Mr. Hawke was upstairs," said I, sinking my voice, which forced her to incline her head to listen, and this was her posture when her father turned to look at her, "my uncle read me a most emphatic lecture on sincerity. He is a sagacious man, careless perhaps of the world's opinion, but with large and correct views of life. He said that a man's love was like a plated teapot: the silver came off through wear; but a woman's love, says he, is genuine metal all through."

"Though it might not be silver, and, therefore," says she, laughing quietly, "not worth so much as the plated teapot." And then, looking at me earnestly, "Pray," she exclaimed, "what had Mr. Seymour's teapot got to do with his lecture to you on sincerity?"

"It was a simile—an image; on the whole clever, I thought," I replied.

"What caused him to lecture you?" she asked.

"I must not tell," I said. "Yes, I will, though; but not to you direct. It shall come to you through Sophie."

At this point there was a bustle. Mr. Hawke asked Amelia to sing, and she went to the piano,

followed by the old gentleman, who stood up still alongside of her, like a parish-constable at a meeting. Had Amelia been Pasta, or Patti, or Tietjens, I must have gone on talking. She warbled and I mumbled. Old Hawke faced round as much as to say, "Good God! will nothing silence that villain's tongue?" but I took no notice.

"I fear," said I, "that this will be the last time I shall ever have the pleasure of sitting in this room with you."

"Why do you say that?" she exclaimed with a quickness of manner that afforded me pure delight. "Are you leaving Clifton?"

"No," said I. "I mean that I shall never be asked here again."

The sweet girl tried to look astonished, but it would not do; she knew the truth, and yet my whipping out with it in this fashion filled her with wonder and amusement. Meanwhile Amelia piped at the piano:—

Oh, fond nightingale, bee-utiful nightingale,
Filling with music the moonlighted—

Boom! went the bass, and the word was lost.

"Speak quite frankly, Mr. Seymour; I really do not understand you," said Miss Florence.

"Yes, you do, you darling," thought I; "but you *want* me to plain, and I'll be so." "The case is this," said I. "I have been told—the news is not nice—that Mr. Hawke is anxious to possess the

young gentleman who accidentally (no doubt) killed our poor dear Flora, as a son-in-law." She coloured up, but I was not to be stopped. "Your father is a keen-sighted man, capable of reading the mind. He has peered into mine, and witnessed there an admiration for you which he is not going to tolerate in a young fellow who is a plain mister, without fortune, and who was bred to the rough and savage calling of the sea. Hence my fears persuade me this is my last visit here."

That I should have ventured so much but for Mr. Hawke's champagne, which gave fluency to my tongue and such an irrepressible ardency to my thoughts as relieved me of all considerations of taste, good or bad, I will not say; but, having made the speech, I was glad. It was not indeed a declaration of love, but it came near enough to it to make my meaning clear to the gentle heart for whose instruction it was designed. But she would let me say no more; she endeavoured to conceal the warm blush on her cheeks by cleverly manoeuvring her fan; but what she concealed from the others she left visible to me, which I dare say she found insupportable, for she left her chair and went to an open window under pretence of drawing the curtains, and there she stood alone until Amelia had done her song, after which she joined my aunt, having by that time regained her composure and natural complexion. Yet let me say here that

there was nothing in her manner of leaving me that indicated the least displeasure. Her quitting her chair seemed to me no more than one of those devices into which a maiden will be driven by stress of blushing. I could not mistake.

I went over to Sophie and Miss Emily Hawke, wanting to see what sort of a girl this latter was. I thought she seemed a bit frightened when I sat down near her. She stared at me hard when I spoke, but presently a not unpleasant manner came to my help, and perhaps her own. I was, indeed, anxious that she should not dislike me, whatever opinions her father might hold. I expressed the sorrow with which I had heard of her delicate health, and spoke with plenty of heart in my meaning too, for no man could have looked into that young girl's wan face, and noticed her thin wrists and fingers and the expression of suffering in her eyes, without compassion. Then I talked to her about the lamented Flora, and London, and kindled a light upon her face by praising Sydney and bragging about Australia, as though the world began at Cape Leeuwin and ended at Cape York, until, what with my stories and attempts at jokes, and the easy and plain, if not free, manner that will come to a sailor as a part of his sea-training, I rendered her as amiable as I could desire. This was the only part of my conduct that night that made Mr. Hawke seem

willing to unbend his gloomy wooden face when he turned it my way. If there was a soft corner in him I suppose that invalid bairn filled it; and I think he was as much pleased that I should be amusing the poor delicate creature as that I was no longer conversing in a low voice with Miss Florence with my nose at her ear.

Yet the effort to produce a pleasing impression on Miss Emily was a mighty hard one. She was not overburdened with intellect. I have elsewhere said that she had her papa's face; I could not but feel that she was her papa's child, and would perish in support of his opinions and wishes: and so I was like a needle trying my hardest to turn north and having to contend with the flow of a steady depolarising influence. All the time I was hoping that Miss Florence would be courted by our lively voices and join us; it was this expectation that supported me: and when I found that she would not come, I gave up and sat without talking, looking moodily at her, and, as is the custom of young lovers, turning over all I had spoken, regretting the omission of this, deplored the utterance of that, wondering what would have been the effect had I said the other, dwelling upon her assertion that nothing pleased her so much as sincerity, coupling it with my uncle's lecture at the dinner-table, wondering if there was anything suspicious in my manner that they should both address me on the same subject,

and how long it would take young Morecombe's sprained ankle to get well.

The evening was brought to a close by the announcement of the arrival of my uncle's carriage. When it came to my turn to say good-night to Miss Florence, I could not help fancying from the look in her eyes that, had not the others stood around, she would have said something more to me than farewell. I might have been mistaken ; but be that as it will, I could not let go her hand without giving it a tender squeeze : and though I admit that it was not returned, I can tell you this, mates, the darling girl did not haul her fingers away from me as if she had been burnt. But there was nothing to whisper, nothing even to be looked, with old Hawke like a policeman looming close alongside. He gave me a finger-nail to shake, bowed ponderously over his waistcoat, but expressed no pleasure at all at having made my acquaintance, nor hinted the least desire to have the honour of seeing me again.

Not very much was said as we drove home : the wheels made too much noise for comfortable talking, nor can it be said that our postures were of the easiest, I, as before, being squeezed between my cousins, which forced me to give my uncle and aunt opposite the benefit of my knees ; so that all I can remember my uncle saying was, "Damme, Jack ! you seem all legs to-night !" on which Sophie

panted into my ear, "Papa should say all heart!" But the drive only occupied a few minutes, and presently we were in the dining-room at home, grog on the table, my uncle in slippers, and my aunt and cousins lingering for a chat before going to bed. Of course our talk was of the dinner, and if we were not so kind in our remarks about our host as people usually are of the friends that entertain them, let it be remembered that my uncle thought old Hawke a prig, and that my cousins objected to his ideas on marriage.

"Do you really think Mr. Morecombe sprained his ankle?" asked Sophie generally.

"No doubt of it," replied my aunt. "Why should he sham?"

"Yes," says Sophie; "but having killed poor Flora by treading on her, he might think the best way to prove the thing was accidental was by pretending he had hurt himself."

"You should suggest that to Miss Hawke," said I. "Shamming or not, I wish he had dined with us; I should like to have seen him and heard him talk."

"A foolish wish, Jack!" cried my uncle. "Had he been present what chance of flirting would you have had?"

"Don't call it *flirting*," said I warmly.

"Eh!" cried he, turning to his wife, "you should have heard me lecture Jack this evening! Whilst

Mr. Hawke was upstairs balsaming his young friend's aristocratic tendons, I——" and he repeated pretty nearly all he had before let fly at me.

" Sophie," said I, when he was done, " please take a note of this, will you? I promised Miss Hawke that she should know through you what my uncle said."

" I am sure Jack doesn't stand in need of such advice," exclaimed Sophie. " What *can* you think of him, papa, to talk about silver-plated hearts and stuff of that kind ? "

" Stuff d'ye call it? " cried my uncle; " why it was first-class imagery. If Jack means to make love to Florence, I want him to be in earnest. She knows him through me; I respect, admire, and am very fond of her, and I don't want any tomfoolery."

" There's no tomfoolery here," said I. " And yet—really—this talk of my making love—these references to my being in earnest—are rather—well, let me say——" and not knowing what to say I stopped, blushed, coughed, and, catching my uncle's eye, laughed.

" I cannot help thinking it is a pity," said my aunt, fanning herself and looking somewhat anxiously from one to the other of us as she spoke, " that we should be in any way, even indirectly, the means of interfering, as it might seem, between Mr. Hawke and his domestic views. I mean that it would not matter one jot, and, indeed, no one

would be gladder than I, if Mr. Jack should be the instrument of putting young Mr. Morecombe down, and of saving Florence from what I have often said I fear will be an unhappy future. For no woman *can* live happily with a fool. But it would have been better, I think, if Mr. Jack could have acted independently of us—if he could have fallen in love with Miss Hawke and paid her attention—as he did to-night, and how annoyed Mr. Hawke looked!—without our having, as it might be, anything to do with it."

"Well, and what *have* we to do with it?" exclaimed my uncle. "We're only responsible for his introduction. We can't help his falling in love."

"No, I quite see that," responded my aunt thoughtfully; "but still I am afraid that Mr. Hawke is annoyed."

"With us, do you mean, Sophia?" cried my uncle.

"Yes, I think he was. He was cool, I thought."

"And what then?"

"Well," said she, "you see we're neighbours."

"And what then?"

"Well, I should not like him to think that—I mean, it would seem unfriendly on our part to act as if it gave us pleasure to thwart his wishes."

"Nonsense!" said my uncle. "What are we supposed to know about his wishes? Why, con-

found him, I'm an honester man to his child than he is. Here I see my nephew admiring her, hanging about her, and behaving as a young fellow would who wants to get a girl to love him ; and thereupon I give him a lecture upon the subject of women's feelings worth its weight in gold, and dismiss him with this injunction : Be honest, be sincere, or sheer off ! But how does the father act ? He meets an old man called Sir Reginald Morecombe ; he brings this old man's son to his house, and in a manner forces him upon his daughter, not because he values her happiness, not because she is a restless creature who had better marry a sucking baronet than her papa's coachman, but because he is eaten up by the parvenu's ambition of improving his social position by importing blood into his family."

"I agree with every word you say, Charles," exclaimed my aunt ; "but," added she inconsequently, "I know it will end in Mr. Hawke cutting us."

"The sun will still shine, mamma," said Sophie.

"And the flowers grow," said Amelia.

"Well, if nobody *will* understand me," cried my aunt, "there is no use in my going on talking."

"*I* understand you," said I, who had listened to this conversation with very mingled emotions, as any man may suppose. "You consider that I am not acting a proper part in doing anything likely to

disturb the friendly feelings which exist between your family and the Hawkes?"

"Twaddle!" rumbled my uncle in his gizzard.

"You consider, perhaps," I continued, "that I did not behave very decorously in so bearing myself this evening towards Miss Hawke as to vex her father, and make him seem cool towards you for introducing me."

"Bosh!" growled my uncle.

"Well," continued I, not noticing my uncle's interruptions, "if this is what you think, I must admit that you are right. But what was I to do? Miss Hawke invited me to her papa's house, and I went. I took her in to dinner and sat next to her: how was I to behave?"

"Look here, Jack!" shouted my uncle, "enough of this. Take a cigar, man; take a cigar. Sophia, next week we return this dinner, d'ye hear?"

"Mr. Hawke will not accept," said my aunt.

"We'll risk it," exclaimed my uncle. "But understand—if he don't accept, I shall put his refusal down, not to Jack yonder, but to my wide-awake and boots. I shall consider that we're not good enough for him."

My aunt and Amelia drew themselves up at this. "I'm sorry your nephew should hear *that*, at all events," said the former. "Not good enough for Mr. Hawke? Ree-ally, Charles!"

My uncle seemed to find this stroke of indignation

exquisite, for he laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks; and indeed, my aunt's "Ree-ally, Charles!" was almost as good in its way as old Hawke's "Ree-diculous!" But, humorous as it might be, for my part I was not in the mood to appreciate the fun of it. I could not but see that if the Hawkes and my relations were to remain friends I must take leave of Clifton, or, at all events, clear out of my uncle's house. I was full of these bothersome fancies when my aunt and cousins bade me good-night. Great-hearted Sophie, noticing the gloom on my brow and wishing to send me to bed happy, whispered as she squeezed my hand, "You are making Florence very fond of you, Jack; I am *sure* she likes you exceedingly," and tripped out of the room. Her words were like a dram to a fainting man; yet I still felt very worried as I resumed my chair and lighted another cigar.

"What was that Sophie croaked in your ear just now?" inquired my uncle.

"Nothing of consequence," I replied.

"The girls don't sympathize with their mother as regards old Hawke, d'ye observe, Jack?" said he; "they take after me. Not that your aunt likes the man. I know what's in her mind. Mr. Hawke is a neighbour: we have exchanged civilities and hospitality; his girls are pleasant companions for my daughters; and whilst your aunt would be the first to clap you on your back and help your love-

making in all ways possible—so heartily does she object to the sort of marriage old Hawke wants to bring about—if you were an outsider, no relation, merely a friend who lived in the town; yet being my nephew and owing your knowledge of the Hawkes to us, she hangs back, and is foolish enough to trouble herself over what Hawke may think, and the prospect of his cutting us."

"Uncle," said I, "I am in a very uncomfortable position. I feel that, under the circumstances, I have no right to remain here; and yet I am so deeply obliged to you all for your affectionate kindness, that I feel I should be acting with brutal ingratitude if I even hinted that I ought to pack up and be off."

"Quite right, the brutallest ingratitude," said he with twinkling eyes; "so therefore what d'ye say, as you common sailors observe, to take a turn with this jawing tackle?"

"But it is only right I should tell you," continued I, "that though to save my aunt from any mortification I should deem it my duty to leave your house" (he made a dreadful grimace as I used these words), "it is not at all probable that I should quit the neighbourhood."

"What!" cried he. "Are you so far gone as that?"

"I'll not put it in that way," said I, speaking very calmly; "but I'll answer by saying that I am

in love with Florence Hawke, and that I could no more dream of returning to London and giving up all chance of seeing her again this side of her marriage with young Morecombe, or any other man her father may induce her to take, than I could of cutting off my nose in the hope of improving my beauty."

"Well, smite my timbers!" cried he, looking at me wonderingly and talking through his nose, as his custom was when suddenly excited; "if ever I could believe you were so much in earnest. Confound ye, I believe you'd marry the girl to-morrow."

"This instant!" I replied warmly.

"But have you reflected?" cried he, running his eye over me. "Are you *sure* of your own meaning? Is it possible that a man can fall in love safely in the short time you have known Miss Florence?"

"Yes," said I stoutly, "quite possible."

"And you wouldn't leave Clifton now, even if you give *us* up!"

"Assuredly not!" I replied.

"Well, roast me!" cried he, viewing me with a kind of admiration; "if this don't beat cock-fighting. But how d'ye calculate on getting to windward of the old fellow and young Morecombe?" continued he, talking inquisitively.

"If I can teach her to love me she'll have me, if she's the woman I believe her to be," I answered.

" Well, hang me, if this don't beat cock-fighting ! " he cried again. " By jingo, Jack, you'll get her—you're bound to win—if *this* is your policy. Why, you have only to make her as much in earnest as you are and the old Hawke 'll have to take wing—he'll have to mizzle. Oppose 'em ; " he ejaculated, looking at me, and talking as though he were thinking aloud. " Why, there's something in the will of two resolved young lovers that makes them fit to conquer all creation—aye, were the globe populated entirely with Hawkes. Well, may I be smothered this blessed night if I'm not considerably astonished too," said he, pitching his cigar through the open window and rising. " Oh for a talking owl, that I might despatch the mouser with news of your ideas to old Hawke, who by this time should be abed, nightcap on, smiling as he dreams of blood ! "

He laughed so heartily that it took him several minutes to light his candle, and after I had closed my bedroom door I could hear the rumbling of his half-smothered laughter in the passage, as if he waited for the fit to subside before entering his wife's room.

CHAPTER VII.

MISS HAWKE'S INSTRUCTIONS.

My uncle's merriment was not contagious. For my part I never in all my life felt less disposed to laugh than after I had said good-night to him. It was anything but pleasant to reflect that my visit was likely to end in making the Hawkes and my relatives enemies. My uncle might pooh-pooh ; my cousins might give me their sympathy ; but it was clear that my aunt had strong opinions on the subject of our duty towards our neighbours, and that she found my admiration of Miss Hawke objectionable—at all events, whilst I was her guest. Therefore, as I had not the least notion of quitting the neighbourhood in which Miss Hawke resided, it was for me to consider whether I should risk offending my uncle by quitting his house whilst there was yet time to save a rupture between the two families, or insure a quarrel by remaining.

Now, to offend so large-hearted and kind a creature as my uncle would have been the very

hardest obligation that could have been imposed on me. I had paid him and my aunt the poor compliment of falling in love with a friend of the family under their daughters' noses. Yet, instead of resenting this, my uncle had applauded my taste, my cousins had as good as given me to understand that I might count upon them as allies, and if my aunt had played a neutral part, neither helping nor discouraging me, it was, beyond doubt, because she did not want Mr. Hawke to find an excuse for taking offence at the behaviour of a young gentleman who owed his introduction to Clifton Lodge to his uncle and herself. Therefore, bearing the goodness and warm-heartedness of these people in mind, I say it was very hard for me to guess what was the right thing to do.

However, I thought my best plan would be to take Sophie into my confidence and ask her advice ; and after breakfast next morning—during which, by the way, I do not remember that any reference was made to the Hawkes nor their dinner—I followed her into the grounds, and begged her to give me ten minutes somewhere out of the heat of the sun, as I had something to say to her.

“ What is it, Jack ? ” says she.

“ I am going to open my heart to you,” said I, “ and want your judgment. You remember what was said in the dining-room last night ? ”

“ Very well indeed,” she replied. “ But you

should not take great notice of what mamma says. She is a little peculiar in some things—too sensitive, as papa thinks. She owns she does not like Mr. Hawke very much, and yet she seems frightened at the idea of giving him offence."

"It is her being frightened," said I, "that makes my position here embarrassing."

"But you need not mind her being frightened, I tell you. It is ridiculous. Suppose Mr. Hawke takes it into his head to cut us. Who cares? Florence will remain friendly, depend upon it, and she is the only one of the lot we like."

"You say, 'Suppose Mr. Hawke takes it into his head to cut us.' Now if he cuts you it will be through me. I do not like the notion: and here I am for you to advise."

"What upon?"

"Is it not my duty to pack up and leave your house?"

"First of all, Jack, why do you want to leave?" says she.

"That Mr. Hawke may have no excuse to cut you."

"Really, Jack," she exclaimed, "I thought you were a clever boy, but I find you stupid. Do you suppose that any of us values Mr. Hawke's acquaintance sufficiently to induce us to raise a finger to prevent him from cutting us if he wants to do so?"

"Well, Sophie, I am forced to judge to a large extent by what your mother says."

"Perhaps you want to go?" says she, looking at me.

"Ay, look your hardest: you'll see nothing resembling that wish," I answered. "Want to go, do I? Want to leave these flowers and trees, and that hospitable home and the kind hearts in it? No, no. I am very well satisfied. Only I cannot stay—I could not be happy were I to stay—if I felt that my presence distressed your mother as a kind of standing annoyance to Mr. Hawke."

"Bother Mr. Hawke!" exclaimed the dear girl, pouting. "Why do you talk of *him*? I thought you were going to speak of Florence."

"So I am. She is involved in all this. It concerns her more than anybody else."

"How? since you talk so coolly of feeling it your duty to leave Clifton, and of course her?"

"Oh, make no mistake, Sophie," said I, shaking my head and very gravely laughing. "I don't mean to leave Clifton, and I don't mean to leave her. If I quit that house there, it will be only to retire to a lodging in Bristol, or hereabouts. No, no, cousin: I am in love with Florence Hawke, and rest assured I am not the man to leave young Morecombe, or anybody else, a clear field, until she, and only she, orders me to sheer off."

"Let us sit down, Jack," said Sophie ; "this is very interesting," and her face took the expression I have sometimes noticed in a girl when she comes to an exciting part of a novel.

"You whispered last night, Sophie dear," said I, "that I might be sure Miss Hawke liked me. Did you say that merely to encourage me, or do you positively know it to be true ?"

"I positively know it to be true."

"How did she convey it? What were her words?" said I, ogling the fat and amiable face alongside of me.

"Why, she said it several times. Last evening, for instance, when she accompanied us upstairs before leaving, I said to her, 'Florence, I really believe you have made my cousin Jack in love with you.' She laughed and answered, 'I believe I have, dear.' I said, 'Are you glad?' 'I don't know,' she answered; 'I won't say; you repeat everything!' 'Indeed I don't,' said I. 'But although he is my cousin I'm not afraid to say he is worth twelve dozens of Reginald More-combes.' She cried '*Hush!*' and looked at mamma, who was having her cloak fastened by Amelia. 'Have you no message for him?' said I. She put her hand over my mouth and told me not to be silly. Is that enough for you, Jack?'

I have often wondered what sort of a face mine was whilst Sophie talked in this strain. To judge

from my feelings nothing could have been more imbecile from the ludicrous delight expressed in it.

"Oh, Sophie!" I cried, "you are a sweet creature to tell me all this. Is not she a darling girl? Leave Clifton! No—though every lodging in Bristol city was full, and there was nothing but an old bathing-machine to sleep in."

"But what are your ideas?" asked Sophie. "Mr. Hawke is certainly not likely to encourage you."

"He may die," said I. "I only want Florence to be true."

Sophie heaved a sigh. All this was in her vein; it was better than a story, for it was real and happening before her; it abounded in living sentiment, and, best of all, she was having a finger in it.

"You must make her fond of you, and then she'll be true," said she.

"I will," I replied; "but you must give me a hand, Sophie. The time will come when I shall only be able to meet her by stealth—if, indeed, she ever consents to meet me secretly: and who is there but you to whom I could trust the messages I should want to send her?"

"But if Mr. Hawke cuts us, and forbids Florence to have anything to do with us, out of fear of you——"

"That's just it!" I cried, fetching my knee a

blow. "There you exactly hit what I'm afraid of: and hence, if not for your aunt's sake, then for my own, ought not I to clear out of this at once, and let old Hawke suppose I have left Clifton?"

She reflected, and then said, "No; better let things take their chance. There's nothing like honesty, Jack. Hiding is mean. Besides, it's undignified. Are you not good enough to be Mr. Hawke's son-in-law? What is his wealth but a kind of peppermint that disguises a nasty flavour? If you hide and meet Florence secretly, even supposing, as you say, that she consented to appointments of that kind, you would only be humbling yourself in her papa's opinion when he came to hear of you, and lead him to suppose you were ashamed of yourself for *daring* to look so high as his daughter, and therefore skulked, as papa would say."

"But it must be plain to you, Sophie," said I, "that if I am to exhaust old Hawke's patience, I can't go on living in yonder house. There is a limit even to your father and mother's hospitality, and old Hawke may hold out for the next ten years."

"Don't trouble yourself about him for the present," responded the sagacious girl. "Think of Florence."

"You mean, I must win her love before disturbing myself about her papa?" Sophie nodded. "Is it to be done, my darling?"

"Now, Jack, if you cannot answer that question, how should I?"

"True, Sophie, true: but what I want to say is, if her house is closed against me, and a coolness springs up between her family and yours, how the dickens am I to see her?"

"Amelia and I must arrange that matter somehow," said she, knitting her plump brow in deep reflection. "I don't suppose, even if Mr. Hawke should cut us, that he could *compel* Florence not to speak to us if we met her; and there really ought to be no difficulty in our meeting her, nor in your being with us when we do meet."

"Oh, you clever girl!" cried I, seizing her hand and squeezing it. "But didn't your papa say I was safe in your——"

"Why talk of —— there's Florence now!" she exclaimed bouncing off the seat, and she ran as hard as she could pelt across the lawn towards the carriage-drive, along which Florence Hawke was quietly walking.

I had a mind to follow, and I should have done so had Miss Hawke shown by her manner that she saw me. They kissed, and I expected them to come my way: but instead, they walked towards another part of the grounds after exchanging a few words, and disappeared behind the house. I remained seated, for I supposed that Sophie would not let her friend go away without bringing her to

me or calling to me to join them ; and sure enough, in about twenty minutes—but not before ; and it might have been twenty days for the tediousness of it as a bit of expectancy and waiting—they came slowly along the walk on the right of the house. I stood up and bowed to Miss Hawke, whose surprise on seeing me I accepted as perfectly genuine. A little colour ran into her cheeks, but if she felt any embarrassment she showed none. With perfect composure she advanced and shook hands with me, and at once accepted Sophie's invitation to sit a few minutes in the shade before going into the hot sunshine. The feeling that my cousin and I had been deep in talk about her infused a sort of shyness in me. After all, bachelors are much more ingenuous and simple-hearted than is believed. On the other hand, she was as lady-like and sweet and self-possessed as if we had never met before.

"What a very cool and fragrant nook this is, Mr. Seymour!" said she. "I wish we had such grounds as these."

"Jack is afraid of his complexion, Florence," said Sophie. "That is why he sits under the trees."

"I left my complexion ashore when I went to sea," I remarked, "and when I returned, although I looked for it, I could not find it. How is Mr. Morecombe this morning, Miss Hawke?"

"He is likely to be confined to his room for some days. But why do you ask?—do you hope he is better?"

"Jack is a most bloodthirsty man, Florence," cried Sophie. "He said he wished Mr. Morecombe had broken his neck instead of twisting his leg for stepping on poor Flora."

"I suppose," said I, "you will be having the animal buried soon?"

"She was buried this morning," answered Miss Hawke. "I shall have a little stone erected over her. *Don't smile, Mr. Seymour.*"

"I am not going to cry, Miss Hawke; but I give you my word I have not the least disposition to smile."

"A dog," said Sophie, "is often the faithfulest friend one has; and if a faithful friend don't deserve a tombstone, I am sure I don't know who does. Florence, will there be any harm in my repeating to Jack what you have told me?"

"Do you mean *now*, dear?" exclaimed Miss Hawke, looking confused.

"If you like," said Sophie. "It is all his doing. He will have to hear about it sooner or later."

"If it is not to be a secret, Miss Hawke, I won't ask you to trust me," said I, deeply admiring her as she sat looking down, a warm colour in her cheeks, her beautiful eyes half veiled, the gold

threads in her hair glancing in the twinkling green shadows cast by the trees, her faultless shape most excellently expressed by the glove-like fit of her simple morning dress.

"It is no secret," she replied, rallying and speaking quietly. "It concerns the friendship between your relatives and my family."

"The long and short of it," burst out Sophie with great heat, "is this: Mr. Hawke has requested Florence to discontinue her visits here. I know she doesn't like me to tell you this before her, but I must either speak or die, for I have never heard of anything more ridiculous and unnecessary."

"What have you done to annoy Mr. Hawke, Sophie?" said I.

"What have *we* done? You mean what have *you* done?" she cried. "You have *dared* to admire Florence, and for that our dear friend here" (kissing her) "is commanded to drop our acquaintance!"

This was a tremendous stroke on Sophie's part. I understood it; I saw its prodigious value to myself, but I confess I was awed by its audacity. That she was distressing Miss Florence to an extremity by whipping out with all this before me, I could witness in the blushing face of the girl, whose instincts were apparently helpless, for she evidently did not know whether to go or stay, or

how so to behave as to give by her conduct the least possible significance to Sophie's blunt candour. But it was a noble opportunity for me, though cruelly obtained, and, trembling as I was and my heart beating wildly, I would not lose it.

"Were ten times worse than this to follow," said I in a low voice to disguise the shake in it, "I should still go on admiring you, Miss Hawke. But if I am to be the only impediment to your visits here, Mr. Hawke may at once withdraw his commands, for I will leave my kind relations."

"I trust you will do nothing of the kind, Mr. Seymour," exclaimed Miss Hawke, keeping her eyes rooted to the ground. "I shall obey my father, though I am disobedient now in calling; but it will not be my fault if your relatives do not remain the same warm friends of mine I have always found them."

Here Sophie shed tears. "Oh, Florence, you know we all love you! How cruel and silly your papa is!—yes, cruel and silly!—boo! boo!" And, lo! whilst she boo'd Miss Florence pulled out her pockethandkerchief and put it to her eyes. Was there ever a more moving sight! I protest, mates, I was very near turning to and having a bit of a snuffle on my own account.

"It is a most unhappy business," said I. "But there is only one remedy: I must go. I cannot remain in a family whose peace of mind I am

disturbing, and whose friends I am alienating. I ought never to have come to Clifton. What made my uncle go and find me out? I have brought trouble on him, and misery—yes, I will say misery—on myself. And if you wish to know what I mean, Miss Hawke, I'll explain by saying that it is miserable to feel that I have no further opportunity of meeting you, of being in your company, of even seeing you."

Here Sophie bounced up. "Florence, before you go I want to say a word to Amelia about your visit. Don't leave before I return," and away she bundled across the lawn.

It was a neatly contrived stratagem, very transparent, and of course as easily seen through by Miss Hawke as the impassioned young chap alongside of her. Possibly Sophie judged by my speech that I was in a fit condition to make love, and so hauled off at what she reckoned the right moment.

"I hope my cousin's candid tongue has not vexed you, Miss Hawke," said I. "You will ascribe her outspokenness to indignation. She loves and admires you, and is angry to think that she may lose you as a friend through no fault of her own."

"Sophie is not a girl to vex anybody," she replied. "Nor will she lose me as a friend."

"And I?"

"Oh, Mr. Seymour, we must hope to meet each

other occasionally in our walks—that is, whilst you remain here," she said, answering with some confusion; and then, perhaps fancying that I might find more in that answer than she intended, she added, "Clifton is not a very large place, and people are constantly meeting."

"I quite understand," said I, making her a little bow. "But the sort of meetings you mean promise but a poor look-out for me."

"But you have threatened to leave, and deprive yourself, therefore, of even such small consolation as a passing bow might afford you," said she, laughing and talking more easily, though all this while she never looked at me.

"I did not say I should leave the neighbourhood," I replied; "only that house yonder."

This hove the darling right into the wind's eye again. She was all aback in a breath, blushing, bothered, and yet *liking* it; couldn't I tell that?

"Miss Hawke," said I, plucking up my heart for a header, and going in, so to speak, with my eyes shut and my hands clenched, "I'm but a plain young fellow—I don't mean plain in the sense of ugliness: my sea training has knocked all power out of me of capering and smirking and stepping round an emotion like a French dancing-master. I can do no more than speak out, and though I don't feel it is fair that I should be tackling you alone here, calling as you have with-

out expecting to see me" (here she turned her beautiful eyes up to me for the first time as if she would say, 'Are you quite sure of *that*?'), "yet, as I may not have another chance, I *must* tell you how deeply I admire you—no, no, let me be honest—let me say love you. From the moment I set eyes on you sitting in that drawing-room over there, with your poor old dog at your feet, you have never been out of my thoughts. It seems but yesterday—ay, you smile—well, the time has been short enough. But then, think how much we have been together, how kind and sweet and gentle you have been to me. That is no compliment, I know—you could not be otherwise. Of course I ought not to talk to you like this. Mr. Hawke would think me a villain were he behind that tree; but then I reckon no man ever yet told a girl he was in love with her but that there was some relative who would rather he should have poisoned himself. You'll go away laughing when you think of me—more amused than angry at my presumption. But I've had my say; you know the truth; and let your father now head you on what course he will, no power on earth can prevent you from remembering that the young sailor fellow, Jack Seymour, whom you met at his uncle's house, was devotedly in love with you, the first girl he ever saw in his life whom he could break his clumsy young heart over."

Mates, what do you say to this as a love-speech? How does it read? I know it's an outburst that staggers me to recall—plenty of it too, mind you, and handsomely rounded like a bit of Parliament jaw. Well I remember it, and that you may not think I've improved it in the writing, let me tell you you have the very words I used. It gave her time to rally, and she stood up, and, looking at me bravely, "Rest assured, Mr. Seymour," says she, "that, let my future be what it will, I shall always remember what you have said to me with *pride*," and my darling was going on, but her colour suddenly failed her, she put out her hand, and said, "Good-bye."

"Won't you wait for Sophie?" said I, keeping hold of her hand. "Don't go without seeing her."

She smiled faintly and replied, "Sophie has forgotten us. Besides, though I am not breaking my word to papa, for I *could* not make him the promise he wanted, I am here against his wish, and must go. Good-bye." And in a moment she was walking quickly to the gate watched by me, who, for love of her, would have cheerfully consented to crawl on my hands and feet after her to her father's house, merely to kiss the imprint of her feet.

Scarcely had she disappeared when Sophie came along. "Where's Florence?" she asked.

"Gone home," said I.

My cousin took a long look at me. The agitation that worked in my soul was expressed, small doubt, in my face.

"Did you say anything to drive her away, Jack?" asked she.

"I told her I was in love with her—that's all," I answered.

"I thought you would—I thought you would!" cried she, looking mighty pleased. "Indeed, I meant that you should. Why did I leave you alone with her but for that? I had nothing to speak to Amelia about. Haven't even seen Amelia. What did Florence say?"

"Why," I answered, "she said that, let her future be what it would, she would always remember my words with pride."

"Did she now—really! And what did you say to that?"

"You see, my dear, it was her answer to what I had already said."

"But what *was* it that you said, Jack? I ought to know. Good gracious, how can I help you if you don't tell me what goes on?"

"Well," said I, mumbling a trifle, for there is no unpleasanter job a man can be set to than having to recite the stuff he mouths to a girl in an impassioned moment—it's like hearing an old love-letter read out before a crowd; "I told her that I was devotedly in love with her, and that, let

her father do what he pleased, he could never make her forget that Jack Seymour had told her she was the first girl he had ever met in his life whom he could break his clumsy young heart over."

"Did you say that *really*?" cried Sophie, with a face upon her as if she were witnessing a sentimental comedy when the most exciting part was being acted. "How very pretty! Florence is sure to have liked *that*. But why 'clumsy' young heart? 'Young heart' is very well, but why clumsy, Jack?"

"Look here, Sophie," said I, "when a man feels as I do and has to speak up, he says what comes into his mouth out of his feelings. I felt I talked clumsily, and that's why I used the word clumsy. Don't criticize, or you'll make me think I could have done better—an unpleasant reflection when it's too late."

"At all events, you have confessed your feelings to her," exclaimed Sophie. "She knows the truth now."

"Yes, she knows the truth now," said I; "and it will be in her mind when young Morecombe's leg gets well enough to enable him to plump down on his knees to her—for I suppose he'll be proposing marriage soon. Did she come here expressly to tell you that her father had forbidden her to call?"

"Yes. She was going to write, but was afraid that she should not be able to make herself fully understood in a letter. Besides, might not she hope to get just another peep at the sailor man she has fascinated?"

"You mean to say, then, that Mr. Hawke has actually forbidden her to visit you?"

"Whilst you are here," answered Sophie.

"Oh!" said I.

"I'll give you the story as she told it me," exclaimed Sophie. "Last night, after we had left, her father inquired if you and she had met before that evening. Florence wanted to know why he asked such a question. 'Because,' said he, 'of the familiarity of young Mr. Seymour's manner to you.' Florence denied that you were familiar, on which Mr. Hawke flew into a rage, asked if his daughter thought him blind, declared she had encouraged you, and ordered her to say whether she and you had met before. Of course she told him the truth; and on her informing him that she had dined with us on the evening of your arrival, that you had accompanied her and Amelia to the Cathedral and taken a drive afterwards, and then lunched at Clifton Lodge, his anger, she admitted, was so great that he could barely speak. 'Florence,' said he, 'I utterly forbid you to call again upon the Seymours, or have any further intercourse with them whilst that young man'

remains in their house.' She said, 'Very well, papa; but I must explain why to them, and I certainly will not promise not to speak to Sophie and Amelia if we meet out of doors.' What more passed she did not tell me. No doubt he fumed and stamped and went on rating her. Those pompous men who are so anxious about the world's opinion are often mean creatures and tyrants in their own homes, when there are no spectators but their family. She said her first idea was to write; then she resolved to call this morning and tell mamma or me or Amelia that her papa had forbidden her to visit us, and why."

"That shows how much she likes you all," said I. "She is a sweet woman—so tender and sympathetic. I doubt if she would have the heart to pick a flower for fear of causing it pain."

"I don't know about that, Jack," said Sophie. "She is very fond of picking flowers. But, as you say, her calling shows a very great liking for us, for in a measure she has defied her papa by doing so. And her coming at once proves her anxiety to immediately prevent any chance of our misjudging her. Amelia and I and she have been so much together, that had a couple of days passed without our seeing her we should have wondered."

"And have called, perhaps, and been affronted by old Hawke or his flunkeys. To save you any

risk of that kind might be one of her reasons in coming here in a hurry after her father's kick-up. How does she speak of Alphonso! In bitterness?"

"Oh no; in sorrow," replied Sophie. "She softened the story in every way—I'm sure of that. And all the time there was a kind of apology for herself in her manner, as if it distressed her to present her father in a disagreeable light; though if she were to talk at all about him she must speak the truth."

"What do you think will be the end, Sophie?" said I. "Will her father get his way with her as regards young Morecombe?"

"No," cried she, warmly; "not in a thousand years. All that he is doing makes her *hate* Mr. Morecombe. Her spirit is not to be shaped by a will—even though it be her father's—that she cannot respect."

"Just my idea! just my theory of her!" I exclaimed in a rapture.

"Though," continued Sophie, "I think this of Florence: her father will never get her to marry a man she does not care about; but I do not think she would ever marry in opposition to her father's wishes. She would never become a wife to please her father only; but she'll die an old maid, I am convinced, rather than defy him in the other direction."

"There's no use in telling me that," said I,

my spirits dropping in me like mercury before a tempest.

"It's your own fault," laughed she; "you *will* ask questions." And, looking at her watch, she was about to leave me, saying something about expecting a dressmaker.

"Before you go, dear," said I, "just tell me, will you, how much of what has happened this morning do you intend to repeat to your family?"

"All that I know," she answered, "which of course excludes your piece of love-making."

"I am going into Bristol for a stroll," said I. "Please tell your mamma I shall not return to lunch. I want to have a look at the city docks—the corporation quays, don't you call 'em?"

"Don't go near the water, Jack," said she; "there's a suicidal look in your face."

"No fear," said I. "I'm not born to be drowned, as I found out when I fell overboard once from a yardarm. Sophie, have I thanked you for the interest you are taking in my—in my—what shall I call it?—in that sentimental business which your father's invitation to Clifton has plumped me into? If I have not, accept now my heartfelt gratitude. I am in earnest, Sophie. As surely as that sky yonder is blue—is it, by the way?" said I, taking a squint aloft to make sure; "yes, a noble, deep-sea, South Pacific blue—so surely do I intend to try my dead best—all that

I know—to win Florence's love and possess her as a wife. But I look to you and Amelia—and to you chiefly—to help me."

"I'll help you, Jack."

"The odds against me are immense."

"Yes, they are; but it is the odds which make the fun and the interest."

"Ay, to others," I grumbled, as she made off after taking another peep at her watch.

Well, she was a dear girl. I sometimes think I ought to have made a sweetheart of Sophie Seymour. How kind she was to listen to me and encourage me! She was a young lady who had never had a lover, and had passed through life without obtaining any further attention from men than plain civilities. When, instead of sneering at two young people whose friends are one too many for them, instead of viewing their transports with a jaundiced eye, wondering that people can make themselves ridiculous, and siding with the relatives of the spoonies—when, I say, instead of doing all this, a girl, destitute as Sophie was of tender experiences, turns to and lays hold of the rope the lovers are hauling upon, and pulls with them with all their might, singing out cheerily as she drags, and urging them to keep up their spirits and never dream of letting go—then, mates, she deserves a pair of wings and a crown on her head. She is of the right sort, a real blessing. And do you know I have more

than once thought that if the male of the two people she helps were to drop the lady he is in tow of, and tackle the woman who is lending them both a hand, he would now and again do better than if he held on to his original choice.

CHAPTER VIII.

I TAKE LODGINGS.

My motive in walking into Bristol was not to inspect the docks and shipping, but to hire a lodging. I did not relish the errand. It was a blow to be obliged to give up my noble bedroom at my uncle's, and the comfortable and plentiful hospitality of his table, because old Hawke was a prig and a two-penny squatter, who wanted his daughter to marry a baronet's son, and would not suffer her to visit a family because I was their guest. I say I did not relish the errand. Nevertheless, it was a stern duty. It was out of the question that I could continue standing between the friendship of Miss Hawke and my cousins, that is, preventing them from meeting at one or the other's house. Nor could I be sure of my aunt's opinion on the subject. She was kind, she was amiable, but she valued her neighbours' opinion and liked society; and do you suppose that I could have gone comfortably to bed in her house, that I could have sat down to a meal

in it, haunted as I must certainly have been by the misgiving that behind my back my aunt would be saying to her husband, "Our nephew is a nice youth ; but I cannot help thinking, dear, that he would have shown a gentlemanly spirit in leaving us when he knew that Florence was prohibited from calling whilst he stayed" ? No : it was my duty to my relations to "make tracks," as Jonathan says, just as it was my duty to myself to look out for lodgings in the neighbourhood. So, lighting a cigar, I swung out of the grounds into the highway and the blazing summer sun, and struck out for Bristol city.

The truth is, though I could very easily have found the accommodation I wanted in Clifton, I considered that it would be unwise to bring up in the immediate neighbourhood of old Hawke's mansion : it would have been a little *too* defiant. He was bound to hear that I had left my uncle and where I was living ; and though Bristol, as everybody knows, is within an easy walk of Clifton, yet the sense of adjacency, and the consternation and anger it would arouse in him, were not likely to be so violent in the old chap if he heard I was lodging in Bristol as if he should be told, "Jack Seymour, sir ? Oh, he lives round the corner. You may see his diggings from your daughter's bedroom window, sir."

And do you ask, my lads, what scheme I had—

what policy? I am talking about old Hawke's consternation and anger as if I was afraid of him. Now I had no policy at all. I was a young fellow deeply in love, forced by a sense of honour, or courtesy, or whatever you please, to quit my uncle's roof, but constrained by my passion for Florence Hawke to dwell in the neighbourhood. Some dim hope of making her as much in love with me as I was with her, and of inducing her to elope, haunted me. A dim hope it was, vague and thin, yet it had a kind of lurking life in me too, and so I confess it. But policy! Heaven bless your hearts, I had none. Never was a courtship begun more aimlessly, never were chances heavier against a man. Had I had an occupation in London, all that I am writing would have been impossible. I should have had to return to my work, and there would have been an end of this sentimental spasm. But I had nothing to do; it was all the same whether I lived in London or Bristol. I was twenty-five, an age of immense resolutions and poetic fancies; I had two cousins who goaded me on; I had met with no particular hindrance in the young lady herself; above all, I was deeply, honestly, enthusiastically in love, with an absolute scorn of Hawke's gold, and with no other desire, as I call my conscience to witness, than the possession of my Australian beauty. And so, mates, you have in a few lines all the

reasons I can offer for walking into Bristol to seek a lodging.

I found rooms better suited to my purse than my ambition in a little house not far from College Green, to which neighbourhood I had been directed, possibly, by the memory of the morning I had spent with Miss Hawke in the cathedral there. I had to choose with care as to the cost, for I had my London lodgings still on my hands, so that the two rents together might easily mount into the charge for a big house. The Bristol woman, who was a gardener's wife, named Mrs. Chump, a person with a severe eye, dressed in black, agreed to let me have a sitting-room and bedroom together, with a plain breakfast, for fifteen shillings a week. This I agreed to pay, undertaking to shift for myself in my other meals; and it was settled that I should instal myself that evening.

As I stood looking about me in the little parlour—the furniture poor, though clean, a few prints of naval victories on the walls, a circular convex mirror reposing like a shield upon the mantelpiece, and causing the observer to recoil as he remarked the hideous caricature of himself in it—I could not help wondering whether I was not making a very great fool of myself in loitering in Bristol instead of returning to London. The poor bit of a room I gazed at set me thinking of the spacious and glittering chambers of Clifton Lodge. I imagined

Miss Hawke passing along outside in her papa's fine carriage, and taking a peep at her admirer's lodgings, and thinking to herself, "This is the sort of life he would bring me to were I to marry him." Upon my honour, it wanted the spirit of a giant to sustain such a shock as that reflection gave me. The idea of her despising me because I had dared to fall in love with her on no sounder merits than an income incapable of yielding me better lodgings than these, was truly awful. And let me tell you, boys, that I was not the less devoted because I was capable of thinking that one good look at my apartments *might* make her despise me ; for a man may be desperately in love with a girl, and yet possess so sensitive a disposition as never to doubt that it would take very little to cause her to turn up her nose at him and back away with a sneer. Perfect love, they say, casteth out fear, but I reckon you must first get your love perfect on both sides.

Anyway, such was the mood these lodgings flung me into, that I am very positive had any friend been at my elbow and asked me to consider what I was doing, I should have pulled my hat over my ears and slept that night in London town. But there was no friend at hand to usefully direct my passing mood ; and being left to myself, why, before I had measured half the distance to my uncle's house, the feelings which had determined me to stick to the district were once more bubbling and poppling

in full force in my foolish young heart, and I was swearing to myself that, come what might, so long as Florence Hawke gave me a fraction of encouragement to persevere and hope, I would never lose sight of her nor cease to believe that I might one day get her to share my future.

On my way to Clifton I turned into a confectioner's shop to get a mouthful to eat, and whilst I was munching a sandwich on top of a high stool, and glowering through the window, that was filled with bottles of candy, glass jellies, and such things, Miss Hawke and her sister drove past ; they swept by rapidly, yet not so fast but that I could notice how lovely Miss Florence looked in a brown hat with the starboard brim looped up. I hopped off my perch and, sandwich in hand, ran to the door to follow her with my eyes, but saw nothing but the back of her parasol, surmounted by the square large figure of the coachman as the carriage rolled downhill.

I proceeded on my way, my thoughts full of the beautiful girl, and asking myself all sorts of questions. Could she ever endure to surrender all the luxury her father was accustoming her to for a poor husband ? Was there the least probability of my ever getting her to love me ? And would her love be of such a kind as to induce her to act as one reads of girls behaving in story-books, and now and then in real life ; as, for instance, when a noble-

man's daughter sacrifices fortune, friends, and family for a fiddler? or when Letitia declines a settlement and the brother of an earl for a missionary?

On reaching home and passing along the drive to the hall door, I caught sight of my uncle sitting at the open window of his library. He lounged in an American chair which hoisted his legs up; a newspaper was on his knee, and a long pipe in his hand. I caught a glimpse of my aunt behind him, a mere outline in the shadow, with a yellow-backed novel on her lap and her chin upon her bosom. She was dozing. And the right kind of afternoon it was for that diversion—an Indian heat in the soft breeze that kept the trees rustling; bees chorussing a sort of bass to the clear treble of the birds; a rich soothing smell of hay mingled with the scents of the flowers—just one of those days, indeed, when the noble form of the tramp may be seen extended at full length in the wayside dry-ditch, with a clout over his face to keep off the wasps, and a wisp under each knee to save the heels of his breeches—a day in which a man who despises ants' nests and defies sunstroke would select for a snooze in the middle of a field of tall grass.

“Hello, Jack!” sung out my uncle, spying me, “where have you been, my lad? Sophie said something about your going to view the docks, and that we were not to expect you to lunch.”

His shout awoke my aunt. I stepped into the room through the window, glad to rest myself; for a man's legs should be made of cork not to feel like a bundle of knots after the ascent of those Clifton hills in the dog-days.

"I have been into Bristol," said I, "but not to look at the docks. Where's Sophie, aunt?"

"She and Amelia have gone to pay some visits, I believe," answered my aunt.

"Not to the Hawkes, Jack," said my uncle, grinning. "I suppose you know what's happened?"

"Yes; I was with Sophie when Miss Hawke called."

"She's an honest lass," said my uncle, "to come with the news plump—not to delay, but to be here with it first thing in the morning, so that there might be no mistake so far as she and we are concerned. I am sorry you drove her away. I should like to have had a word with her."

"I don't know that I drove her away, uncle," said I, much confused. My cousin, of course, had told all.

"I say, Sophia," called out my uncle, "what d'ye think of this generation? What's your calculation concerning these times? Fancy youngsters, not only *falling* in love, but *making* love—actually whipping out with their sentiments after two or three meetings with the girls. Don't it beat cock-

fighting? What would *our* papas and mammas have thought of such energy? I put it all down to George Stephenson. Had he left the stage-coach alone, we'd have been going along at the old decorous rate of seven or eight miles an hour, and a long lounge between whiles at the hostelries. Nowadays the world's in tow of the locomotive; and we make love, we make money, we are born, we live, and we die with our steam-gauges indicating a steam pressure one remove from bursting point."

"You see what I feared has taken place, Mr. Jack," said my aunt, putting a mark in her book and closing it. "Mr. Hawke has taken offence; and, though no doubt we shall remain on bowing terms with Florence and Emily, our visiting must be considered at an end."

"Well, if I meet Hawke I'll shake hands with him; but he'll never get me across his threshold again," exclaimed my uncle. "The old coxcomb! think of him prohibiting his daughter from visiting us. I wish I had him at sea, I'd work his old iron up."

"I cannot blame him," said my aunt. "It is exceedingly mortifying so far as *we* are concerned, because we are really quite innocent of any intention to mortify him. But if you will put yourself in his place, Mr. Jack, and imagine yourself anxious that your daughter should marry the man of your own choosing, and then conceive you were

told that during your absence she had been frequently in the company of a young stranger who did not disguise that he was in love with her, I am sure you would wish to terminate the intimacy by desiring her not to call upon the family whilst the young man continues in their house as a guest."

"I quite agree with you," said I. "I do not blame Mr. Hawke."

"Mind! I do not *excuse* his views of marriage," she continued. "I consider his anxiety to marry his child to a man she does not like odious. I am only trying to justify his behaviour so far as we, or rather so far as *you*, are concerned, mortifying as it is to us."

"I was going to ask him to dinner," said my uncle, laughing. "D'ye remember my saying that he wouldn't come? He's done more—he's gone leagues ahead of my prophecy! Oh, he's an old fool!" and he smoked his pipe vehemently.

"I am extremely vexed," said I, addressing my aunt, "that I should have been the means of subjecting you to this annoyance."

"It's no annoyance," called out my uncle. "The girls liked Florence, and she's still their friend. There's nothing to bother over."

"It is perfectly true," I continued, "that I am in love with Miss Hawke. It would be ridiculous in me to attempt to conceal what you can all see. But Mr. Hawke must surely have a great deal of

the Turk as well as the prig in his nature to forbid her, so to speak, to unveil her face to any man but the person he wants her to marry. If she can endure discipline of that kind, she has not the spirit I want to believe she has."

"Just my opinion, Jack—what I said when Sophie gave us the news," said my uncle.

"He was annoyed by the marked attention you paid Florence last night," said my aunt.

"Yes; and by her liking it," observed my uncle.

"If," said my aunt, "your manner, Mr. Jack, had not been so pronounced—if my husband had not, as I *must* say, rather foolishly yielded Miss Hawke to you by pretending to mistake the daughter he was asked to give his arm to, there would have been no grounds for Mr. Hawke's suspicions, and he would not have said anything to Florence about her visits here. It is ridiculous to imagine he would act in this manner to all young men and the families they might be staying with. But, unfortunately, he had only to combine my husband's *deliberate* mistake with your behaviour to his daughter, to suspect even more than was intended. I mean, he would believe your uncle was playing into your hands, and had asked you down in the hope of your securing Florence as a wife."

"A good job too!" said my uncle. "I respect

loyalty in relations, and heartily hope that's his notion. Why shouldn't I find my brother Tom's son a pretty heiress for a helpmate? Isn't he good enough for Florence Hawke?"

"That's not the point, Charles," replied my aunt.

"Anyway," continued my uncle, "you may take it that Florence don't think herself too good for Jack. What do *you* think, nephew? There's a meaning in her hurrying round here this morning to pour her yarn about her papa's severity into Sophie's ear, which I should take to my heart and cuddle if I were twenty-five years old, single, and her admirer. And does the old fellow really suppose he is going the right way to work to make his daughter do what he wants? What fools there are in this world!"

"There is only one way," said I, addressing my aunt, "of pleasantly ending this unfortunate affair."

"Not by giving Florence up—surely?" cried my uncle.

"The condition," I went on, "is that Miss Hawke is only to cease visiting you whilst I remain your guest."

"Oh, excuse me, Mr. Jack," cried my aunt, lifting up her hands; "there are two sides to that condition. We shall always be glad to see Florence; but after what has passed, none of us—

I speak of my own particular family—could ever dream of calling on the Hawkes again ! ”

“ At all events,” said I, “ the condition, so far as Miss Hawke is concerned, relates to me, and me only. I will not say I have already trespassed upon your kindness——”

“ None of that ! ” bawled my uncle.

“ I mean this,” said I; “ it is out of the question that Miss Hawke can be debarred from visiting you by me. I must therefore leave you.”

“ When ? ” said my uncle.

“ To-day.”

“ By what train ? ”

“ By no train at all. I have taken lodgings in Bristol.”

My aunt looked startled, my uncle incredulous.

“ Taken lodgings in Bristol ! ” cried he. “ When did you do that ? ”

“ Just now.”

He turned to his wife and stared at her. “ Well,” said he, drawing a deep breath, “ Jack’s a darned modest fellow, anyhow.”

“ I hope you are not in earnest,” said my aunt, whose kind heart did not at all relish this new posture in me, although she might consider I was acting very properly.

“ I am indeed,” I replied. “ I have hired a couple of rooms, and remove there this evening. After the kindness you have shown me, it is painful

to be forced to leave you in this fashion. But I know my duty. Mr. Hawke shall have no further excuse to deprive his daughter of my cousins' society. Besides, I must not forget I have already been here a fortnight, and I never intended to inflict my society upon you for a longer term."

My uncle sat listening and looking at me with his head on one side, his right eye half closed, and his face full of thought. I had fully expected an explosion of affronted cordiality, of indignant hospitality, and was therefore not a little surprised to find him silent and contemplative. It was my aunt who expostulated, and I must say she tried hard to induce me to prolong my visit. She said that whether I went or whether I stayed could not in the least degree alter matters now. She heartily hoped there had been nothing in her manner to cause me to leave. Since I meant to stop in Bristol, she could not understand why I thought it necessary to take lodgings when her house was at my service. To which I replied that I was exceedingly obliged to her for her kindness, and that I should part from her with great regret and much gratitude for the hospitality I had received.

All this while my uncle continued watching me. He waited until my aunt had given up trying to coax me, and then said, "Jack, what makes you stop in Bristol? Why don't you return to London?"

"Because I like the air here," said I.

"Have you given up your town lodgings?"

"No."

"Can you afford to keep two sets of rooms going on something under two hundred and fifty pounds a year?" cried he.

"I must endeavour to do so," I replied.

"Sophia," he exclaimed, "I suppose you can guess why Jack sticks to Bristol?"

"It is not hard to understand," she answered.

"Well," continued he, talking to her as though I were not present, "it proves that he is in earnest. And as that's so, he ought not to miss of our encouragement and goodwill. He knows Florence through us; he can charge us with having shown him the road into this business; and we're bound not to leave him up to his waist in it, more especially since old Hawke's behaviour has relieved us of all sense of our duty towards our neighbour."

"Don't trouble about me," said I. "If I am up to the waist now, I'll scramble out by-and-by somehow, depend upon it."

My uncle left his chair and walked about the room, and shortly afterwards my aunt went away, being signalled by him to do so, as I might judge by the manner of her going. When the door was closed upon her, my uncle asked me where I had taken lodgings. I told him. He then inquired at

what charge I should be, and this question also I answered.

"You have quite made up your mind to leave us?" said he.

"I have," I replied, "and for the reasons I have given."

"All right," said he; "we'll say no more on that head. If you had stayed we should have been glad. Since you *won't* stop, you must go. But what is your scheme? what do you hope to do by living in Bristol? Surely Florence isn't *pledged* to you, is she? Hang me, if I'm not in a mind to believe anything!"

"I wish she were," cried I. "Loving her as I do—as she knows I do, and I say thank God for that!—do you think I could go and put a hundred miles of railway between us? I may be acting like a fool—or, what is the same thing, like a very young man; but whilst Miss Hawke remains single I must keep near her, in the hope of seeing her, of meeting her, of talking to her, of winning her love, and—and—"

"Bolting with her, d'ye mean?" asked he.

I made no answer.

"Well," said he, "boil me alive, Jack, if you don't deserve all the luck you may get. Upon my word, this business is like one of those romances I used to read when a lad, where the heroine elopes with the hero in a thunderstorm, and returns with

her husband after many adventures to receive the tremulous blessing of her aged father the Duke."

Seeing, however, that this banter was not much to my taste, though I forced a sickly grin whilst he talked, he grew serious, said that though he did not find fault with me for falling in love with Florence Hawke and clinging to the place in which she lived, I ought not to forget that my prospects, so far as she was concerned, were exceedingly small. For, first, I had to make her in love with me—and had I substantial reasons for supposing I could succeed? Second, in order to make her in love with me it was necessary that we should meet; and how was *that* to be managed now that I had left his house and was tabooed by her father? Third, even if I induced her to meet me, and succeeded in gaining her love, did I think she was likely to defy her father by so bold and reckless a step as an elopement? And if I did not suppose her capable of any audacious action of that kind, what ideas was I flattering myself with? He would tell me this: that unless I could get her to bolt with me I should never win her as a wife; and since there was no girl he ever remembered meeting less likely to elope with a man than Florence Hawke, he would earnestly advise me—not, indeed, to relinquish my pursuit; there was no harm in my taking lodgings in Bristol; it was a healthier place than London; its temptations were

few, and I could save money, but—not to allow my hopes of success to gather too much weight, lest disappointment should prove a severer punishment than I had any suspicion of.

He talked to me, indeed, very much as old Crusoe talked to young Robinson ; and as with that famous person, so, had I allowed my uncle's counsels to influence me, I should have been spared some adventures very nearly as strange and surprising as those which befell Defoe's hero—though to be sure they were not limited to an uninhabited island, nor did they last, thank goodness, eight and twenty years.

After he had eased his mind by lecturing me, my uncle seated himself at a writing-table, and asked me how long I was likely to use the lodgings I had taken. I told him I had no notion. “ But how long,” says he, “ d'ye mean to give yourself either to win the girl or drop all thoughts of her ? ” I replied that there was no good in asking me questions of that kind, as it was impossible for me to answer them.

“ Do you reckon,” says he, “ on stopping in Bristol six months ? ”

“ Well,” said I, laughing at his importuning me in this manner, “ I ought pretty well to know where I am at the end of six months.”

On this he pulled open a drawer and took out a cheque-book ; and after making some calculations

on a piece of paper, he filled up a cheque and handed it to me.

"There, my boy," said he, "put that in your pocket. I'll pay for six months' lodging."

I looked at the cheque and saw that it was for fifty pounds. I was taken plump aback by his kindness, and for some moments could only look stupidly at the cheque. I then put it on the table, told him that I had no words to thank him for his generosity, but that I was not in want of money, and was very well able to support such expenses as I was likely to bring upon myself. What followed came very near to being a quarrel. He called me an ungrateful young son of a cook. Had I not assured him that nothing but Mr. Hawke's instructions to Florence drove me away? I answered yes. Then, he wanted to know, what right had I to insult him by refusing to remain his guest on my own terms?

"I don't understand you," said I.

"Why, man," cried he, "don't you see that, as you say you can't be comfortable in this house owing to Alphonso Hawke's orders to his daughter, I'm taking lodgings for you in the neighbourhood, keeping you as a sort of out-door guest; and that instead of paying your landlady myself I am asking you to pay her for me? Can't you understand that, you swab?"

"Yes," I replied; "but I'm hanged if I'm a swab!"

"How's that?—not a swab!" cried he. "Were you not, would you be so thick and flabby in your intellects as to offer to pay a gentleman whose guest you are for your own keep? Take that cheque, man, and let's have no more jaw."

As it was certain that he would have resented any further refusal of it as an affront, I put the cheque in my pocket, thanking him as heartily for his kindness as the temper I was in by being called a son of a cook and a swab would suffer. However, as you may suppose, this fit of irritation did not last long. Indeed, I should have deserved very much harder names than my uncle had bestowed on me had I not appreciated the fatherly goodwill he was showing me. And though I had talked as if I did not want the money, give me leave to say that in the depths of my soul I found it a mighty acceptable gift, and that, trifling as the sum was, it distinctly heartened me up and made me take a cheerfuller view of the extraordinary waiting-job I had set myself; so magical is the influence of vulgar dross upon the mind even when wholly occupied by sentiment.

I sent my luggage down into Bristol by Cobb the man-servant, with a message to the landlady that I would arrive at her house between nine and ten o'clock. "And, Cobb," said I to the man, "be good enough to tell her to buy me a bottle of cognac and put it on the table along with some

soda-water ; " for, to speak the truth, after the music, the conversation, the company of my relations and friends, the pleasant evenings I had passed at my uncle's house, winding up with cigars, iced drinks, moonlight wanderings among the trees, and the like, I recoiled from the prospect of the loneliness of the first night in the little lodgings, and foresaw the necessity of some provision against low spirits. If there be any teetotallers among you, don't be shocked. I do not know that in all my life, mates, I ever took a thimbleful more of grog than my head could carry ; but I'll tell you this—there have been occasions when a well-timed glass of liquor has served me better than a clap on the back or a handshake—at sea, look you, where, after twelve hours of heart-breaking work with the pumps or up aloft, nothing but the caulkier of rum served out under the break of the poop by the light of a bull's-eye lamp could have furnished me with physical force enough to crawl up the rigging for the twentieth time to help the others to stow the remnants of what had been a brand-new close-reefed sail.

When Sophie and Amelia returned from making their visits, and were told that I had hired lodgings in Bristol and meant to quit their house for good that evening, they stared at me as if I had taken leave of my senses. My aunt, my uncle, and I were in the drawing-room killing a half-hour before

dinner when the girls came in, and I see them now, fat, amazed, agitated, as my aunt said, "Sophie, Amelia, what do you think? Mr. Jack has taken apartments in Bristol, and is going to them this evening. In fact, he actually sleeps in them to-night; so that we lose him with wonderful suddenness," says she, nodding fast as she spoke.

A variety of exclamations broke from the girls: "Apartments in Bristol!" "Going this evening!" "Sleeps there to-night!"

Here I cried, "Don't you think I am better than a circulating library? What novel can approach the sensation I cause by my movements?"

"But why are you leaving, Jack?" said Sophie. "What has happened?" and she ran her eyes over her papa and mamma, in search, maybe, of the traces of a recent quarrel; for the dear creature had never dreamt that I was in earnest when I told her it was my duty to clear out of the house. My aunt up and spoke; related my reason for going, with all the garnishing that a woman's fluent tongue could furnish to a simple yarn, and wound up by a fresh and rather wild appeal to me to reconsider my decision and not be foolish.

"It's too late—everything's settled; let us have no more of this, Sophia," growled my uncle, casting, nevertheless, a somewhat admiring eye upon his wife, in whose cheeks the heat of her own volu-

bility and energy of gesticulation had kindled a bright colour, and who, what with her well-fitting dress, long train, fine figure, thick hair (every scrap of it her own, my uncle once assured me), good teeth, and shining eyes, looked, I am bound to say, uncommonly handsome, and twenty years too young to be the mother of the two plump, full-grown women who stood listening to her, lost in wonder and ingenuous excitement. I really could not help feeling flattered when I observed the annoyance and disappointment my cousins showed on discovering that it was all true—that I had taken lodgings and was quitting their roof in a few hours. They had a sisterly affection for me; besides, they might have found it nice to have a young man in the house, not offensively ugly as men go, a young fellow to drive with, to introduce, to be seen with.

“I should certainly, if I were you, Jack,” said Sophie, eyeing me (bless her!) almost tearfully, “be above allowing Mr. Hawke to drive you away from your relatives, who, you well know, are very glad to have you with them.”

“Unless, indeed, Jack is tired of us and wants to regain the independence which only lodgings can confer, so men say,” observed Amelia, whose satire was neutralized by her corpulence and excessively good-natured face as fast as it flowed.

However, my uncle, who was sick of the subject

—and small blame to him—begged his daughters to say no more about it; Jack meant to go; he knew his own business best; let him then, in the name of peace, depart without any more arguments. So, in compliance with his request, we changed the conversation and presently went to dinner, which, in spite of all my efforts after a cheerful exterior and sprightly observations, was so dull, flat, and melancholy a meal that anybody might have supposed we were only lingering over funeral refreshments until the hearse and the mourning coaches drove up. Sophie, who was full of my going, tried several times to start me as a topic, making sundry feints by vague questions and observations about the Hawkes; but she was regularly parried and dealt with by her papa, who forced her to retire with confusion; until at last there seemed to dawn upon us all the conviction that any further references to my departure would be in bad taste. But after dinner, and when my uncle and I had been sitting together for a short time, the window being open, I spied Sophie outside flitting about in the gloom. I was anxious to have a few words with her before going, so I stepped on to the lawn.

Sophie instantly began: “When did you take the apartments, Jack?”

“This morning,” I replied.

“You told me you were going to look at the

city docks. Why didn't you explain your real motive ? " said she, reproachfully.

" Because," I answered, " I wanted to make my arrangements before speaking, so that I might be able to say it is too late when you all, in your great kindness, should, as I knew you would, try to persuade me to remain here."

" I am not going to persuade you," said she. " But what good can you do in lodgings ? You are much less likely to see Florence than were you to stop with us."

" Ay, Sophie ; but will you tell me how long in decency I ought to go on burdening you with my company ? "

" As long as ever you like," said she. " You know it is no burden. We are delighted to have you."

" Yes ; but that does not render it the more proper in me to encroach on your kindness. Now, in lodgings I can take my time. I can never be embarrassed by the feeling that I am trespassing. Besides, I shall be as comfortable in Bristol as in London."

" But what do you mean to do ? You can't call on Florence. Do you expect her to call on *you* ? "

" I am full of expectation," I replied. " And why ? because I have you as a friend, Sophie. I can count upon your sympathy ; I feel that I can rely upon your affection for your foolish young

cousin to help him in his love for your beautiful, your adorable friend."

I seized her plump hand ; and indeed, boys, it was just the sort of night for sentimental twaddle —warm, dark, the stars large and luminous, the atmosphere breathless, the stillness full of fragrance, with now and again the notes of a clarion-tongued bird coming out of the deeper darkness where the trees were—I seized her plump hand, I tell you, pressed and fondled it, and she laughed, low and gratefully, a laugh full of relish and satisfaction. Upon my word, when I look back, it does not gratify my vanity to think that she was not desperately in love with me : for in my thankfulness for her sympathy and kindness, and with the image of Florence always in my mind's eye, I would talk to her so sentimentally, caress her hand, breathe in her ear and the like, that there would have been little to wonder at had she come to the conclusion that the other girl was only an excuse, and that it was she I adored.

" So far as Amelia and I are concerned, we will do all that we can to help you, Jack," said she. " But understand : we can do nothing unless we discover that Florence thinks of you, and likes to hear of you. We'll carry letters and messages between you as often as may be wanted ; and I, for one, shall take a particular delight to do what I can to put you in the place young Mr. More-

combe wants to fill, and to thwart Mr. Hawke—for I quite hate that old man now. But if Florence is cold about you, if she should not like to be reminded of you, we shall be unable to help; for you know, Jack, that men cannot make love by proxy, unless they happen to be kings."

"Don't discourage me," said I, "on the very threshold. I don't ask you to make love to her for me, but you might, when you meet her——"

"I shall meet her often, I hope; and I shall speak to her as often as we meet, unless she is with her father," interrupted Sophie.

"I say, no harm could come from your telling her how devoted I am, how deeply I love her, and why I have left Clifton, and why I *cannot* leave Bristol."

"Oh, certainly, Jack; I can tell her that, and a great deal more; and if she is fond of you I shall not be able to tell her too much, and you shall know all that she says about you exactly—good or bad; so that you will be able to decide whether to go on lingering in lodgings in Bristol, or return here, or go back to London."

"And Sophie, my darling," said I, "if you find that she doesn't give my name the cold shoulder, but, on the contrary, is pleased to hear you talk about me, I suppose to a girl possessed of your cleverness, it would not be quite impossible to arrange an accidental meeting—you know what I

mean—a chance encounter somewhere, where trees are plentiful, and people few—eh, Sophie ?”

“ Oh, that's very easily managed,” said she, in a voice of contempt that was like a dram to my spirits. “ If Florence is willing, there can be no limit to what may be done. It will entirely depend upon her, not upon Amelia's and my good wishes—so please bear that in mind.”

“ When will you call upon me ?”

“ To-morrow morning, just to see what sort of lodgings you have. You will please leave us your address. And how often will you come to see us ?”

“ Very often, depend upon it.”

“ Because,” said she, making her manner impressive by wagging her forefinger at me—the starlight and the illumination from the lower windows rendered us plainly visible to each other—“ the oftener you come the oftener you are likely to meet Florence without obliging us to invent any stratagems. To-morrow morning I shall write to Florence and tell her that you have left Clifton, and beg her to acquaint her father with the fact, that he may withdraw his orders to her to discontinue her visits here. I shall make my letter sarcastic, and ask her in a postscript to read it to Mr. Hawke.”

I was about to beg her to do nothing of the kind, lest the old man should take it as a new affront, and base further injunctions to his daughter

upon it, when my uncle, coming to the window, bawled out : “Are there burglars yonder ? Who’s that mum, mum, mumming there ? Are the bees still abroad ? or has a sick cow strayed into these grounds to die ? Sophie, is that you ?” She answered “Yes.” “Without any head-gear on ? D’ye know the dew falls like a thunder-squall ? Come in, come in, and bring the melancholy Jack-anapes with you.”

This ended our confab, and half an hour afterwards I stood in the hall shaking hands all round, and saying good-night and good-bye.

“ You understand, Jack,” said my uncle, “ that it’s only a shift of premises. You’re still our guest.”

“ A knife and fork will always be laid for you,” said my aunt : “ and your bedroom kept ready, so that we shall require no notice of your return.”

“ You are very foolish to go, Jack ; but there’s no reasoning with men,” exclaimed Amelia ; and Sophie, as she squeezed my hand, mumbled in a whisper that I might count upon her.

“ God bless you all ! and thanks,” said I : and lurching through the hall-door I gained the highway and stepped out for my lodgings in Bristol.

CHAPTER IX.

MY BRISTOL LODGINGS.

THE first night in new lodgings when you are alone and in a strange town does not always make a pleasant memory. Nothing fits : the armchair is too big or too little ; the bed-mattrass is too hard or too soft ; the washstand is in the wrong corner ; the toilet tablet-table is in the road of the window ; and the inhospitality of things new to your habits is oppressive. In London the feeling that my home was a lodging had been sunk by custom ; but the sense came up in me very strong when I reached my Bristol apartments, and stood in the bit of a sitting-room, contrasting it with my uncle's home, and gazing vacantly at the table, on which were a bottle of brandy, a bottle of soda-water, and a corkscrew, upon a cheap brand-new tray. I heard a man's voice rumbling under my feet, and there was a smell of coarse tobacco about ; and when I cast my eyes around, and beheld no books, no intellectual solace of any

kind outside the prints, which were speedily to be exhausted, whether as diversions or as moral instructors, I felt very lonely indeed, and sat me down in the stiff-backed, hair-covered armchair that stood nakedly confronting the frigid black grate and its bleak furniture of fender and irons, with a misgiving upon me that I was acting very much like a donkey.

Mrs. Chump broke in upon my musings by asking at what time I wanted to be called in the morning, and what I wished for breakfast. Called in the morning! what was there to get up for? and wish for breakfast? there was not a phantom of a wish of the kind in me. But I was bound to give her an answer, so I muttered something about eggs and bacon and half-past eight, and then pulled the cork out of the brandy-bottle and filled a pipe.

However, I cheered myself up after a bit by considering that first of all I had acted as any gentleman would in relieving my uncle's house of a guest that had set two families by the ears; next, that when Florence Hawke came to hear that I could not tear myself away from the neighbourhood, and was living lonesomely in lodgings for her sake, she would find a good deal in the news to persuade her that I was very honestly in love. And then I reflected that I had two most emotional champions and allies in my cousins, in whose

loyalty and love of romance I might have the utmost confidence; and I also consoled myself by thinking that, though I might have prolonged my stay at my uncle's without risk of being thought an intruder, the time must certainly arrive when my sense of propriety would oblige me to leave his house; so that, since I was determined to keep near Florence, I had only anticipated my departure by a week or two by coming to these lodgings at once.

I often recall myself sitting in that little room, smoking my pipe, my mind labouring under a crowd of thought like a hard-pressed ship in a seaway. Nathaniel Hawthorne has a story in one of his books of a man's conscience standing behind him and giving him a dig with a sharp knife from time to time as it holds up pictures of his early life to his face. I, who write this in middle age, stand in fancy alongside that arm-chair, and look at my foolish young self as I sit with my legs crossed, blowing out smoke, sometimes grinning over a hope, sometimes scowling over a misgiving, and very often hauling out Miss Florence's portrait from a side pocket to gaze at it and kiss it. Even then I thought the adventure I had embarked on a queer one, with little meaning in it, and yet not destitute of a kind of nebula of an idea either. But what must I think now, looking as I do, so to speak, through the other

end of the telescope, and recall the amazing experiences to which my sojourn at Clifton and Bristol was merely a tender, uneventful introduction? Would I go through it again? Can I conceive of any woman so divine, so stately, so majestical, so lily-white, so bland, so all the rest of it, as to seduce me into putting to sea for her lovely and noble sake, and getting shipwrecked? What say ye, mariners? Is there any woman worth being shipwrecked for—not in a commercial sense, but *literally*, amid a storm of wind, in the trough of a raging ocean, when the lightning makes a hell of the sooty sky, and the yelling of the hurricane mingling with the cries of the drowning sounds like the voices of fiends triumphing over the agonies of the damned? Answer that, my lively hearties, if so be that you know what it is to be shipwrecked.

I turned in shortly before twelve, and reckoned upon a tossing night: instead of which I fell sound asleep, and never opened my eyes until Mrs. Chump rapped upon the door. My lodgings were in a street, and when I rose to shave myself, the look-out over the way formed a very depressing contrast with the bright fresh scene of trees and flowers I had every morning gazed at from my bedroom in my uncle's house. Nevertheless, I felt on the whole pretty lively, and was in a temper to take a cheerfuller view of my conduct

and resolutions than my spirits had allowed me on the previous night. The street gave me but a narrow horizon; but the sky was to be seen overhead, and my mood perhaps came to me from the radiancy and life of it; for there was a strong breeze of wind blowing, and clouds, like bursts of cannon-smoke, white and gleaming, were sailing across the blue in stately processions, and the dancing sunshine seemed like a kind of laughter upon the face of the world.

When I arrived at the little parlour under my bedroom I found breakfast ready; and though it was but a modest repast, yet what cooking there was in it was up to the hammer, the coffee excellent, everything clean, a nosegay in a tumbler in the middle of the table, and a local newspaper damp and flat lying upon the napkin. Trifling as these matters are to mention, I found them reconciling, and when I had breakfasted and stowed myself away in the armchair—there was but one—with a pipe in my mouth and the newspaper in my hand, I could not help reflecting that, even if I viewed this freak as no more than a holiday jaunt, I could not have chosen a brighter scene than Bristol, with its docks and its picturesque old houses, and the river winding through the streets, and the noble Clifton scenery close at hand.

Sophie had promised to call, and I remained in my lodgings the whole morning for fear of missing

her. A mighty long morning it was : but an end was made of it shortly before noon by a hearty knock on the door, and my cousins were announced by the landlady. They looked around them, evidently amused by the size of the room ; and I confess that when they were seated it seemed to have shrunk to half its real dimensions, owing, no doubt, to its being pretty well filled by the two fat girls and myself. They asked me how I had slept, whether I was likely to be comfortable, whether my love for Florence was going to be proof against the loneliness of the lodger's life, and so forth. When I say they, I mean it was chiefly Amelia who asked these questions, for there was often a little touch of banter in her as if she never thoroughly gave me credit for earnestness ; whilst Sophie, on the other hand, would always return sigh for sigh and echo groan for groan. They had no news to give me. They had merely called to see what sort of apartments I had taken, and to know if I would dine with them that evening.

"No," said I ; "do not tempt me. I want to insure myself to solitude. I want to accustom myself to my own company ; unless, indeed——"

Sophie understood me. "No," said she, "you will not see Florence."

"Have you written to her ? "

"Yes," she answered, putting her hand in her pocket ; "and here is her reply." She gave me

a little cocked-hat note, the counterpart of the one I possessed. It was dated 10.30, proving that Sophie had written very early indeed, and that Miss Hawke had replied immediately. The little missive trembled in my hand as I read :

“ DEAREST SOPHIE,

“ Papa is out, so I must wait to tell him that your cousin Jack has left you. I shall not read your letter to him, as there is really no reason why he should know that your cousin has taken apartments in Bristol. The whole thing is quite absurd enough as it is. I hope to see you soon ; and I trust, dear, this foolish anxiety about me on papa’s part will not prevent you from calling —as on my side, I certainly do not intend to let it estrange us. I am very much ashamed that I should have been the *cause* of your cousin leaving you. I know how greatly you enjoyed his company ; but though I *am* the cause, I feel that I am innocently so, and let me assure you that nothing ever surprised and vexed me more than papa’s desire that I should not visit you whilst your cousin remained at your house.

“ Yours sincerely,

“ FLORENCE HAWKE.

“ P.S. I suppose you will *often* see your cousin ? Poor fellow ! I hope he has found nice apartments.”

"There's a deal in that note about you, isn't there, Jack?" said Amelia, after I had read it twice through, and was beginning for the third time.

"There is, indeed," I exclaimed, thrilled by the references. "But what does she mean by saying that the whole thing is quite absurd enough?"

"That her papa's conduct is absurd," answered Sophie.

"Are you sure?" said I, doubtfully, looking at the sentence in the letter. "You don't think she means mine, do you?"

They were both so confident on that head that they vanquished my misgivings. I asked Sophie if she meant to call at Clifton Lodge. She said that if her mamma did not object she would call—that is, of course, if Mr. Hawke allowed Florence to visit them.

"We don't mean to say, Jack," observed Amelia, "that we should call if you were not concerned in our remaining friendly with Florence, because we all consider Mr. Hawke has behaved most insultingly to us. But Sophie and I have talked things over as we came here, and we have agreed, if mamma does not object, to occasionally visit Florence, so as to enable her to call upon us."

"I am afraid your mamma will object," said I. "She has said none of you could ever dream of

calling upon the Hawkes again after what has happened."

"She may change her mind ; and if so," said Sophie, "the arrangement should suit you very well."

"Why, yes," said I, "if I am to meet Miss Hawke at your house. But will she call, knowing her papa's objections ? And will not old Hawke stop his daughter's visits when he hears that I am in Bristol ? "

"You are really a very hard person to help," cried Amelia. "Here is a pile of might-be's ! If all that you fear is going to take place, we must salaam and give your love-troubles up—for what can we do ? "

On this I mentally cursed myself for a fool—for was not I one, to go and invent difficulties, and damp the romantic fancies which rendered these cousins my warm allies ? Looking humbly at them both, I begged their forgiveness, and promised never to express any more apprehensions nor to entertain any further forebodings, but to take things as they came, and if the wind drew ahead on one tack, to shift the helm and try the other tack.

"There's nothing else to be done, Jack," said Sophie; "for if mamma won't, and Florence won't, and Mr. Hawke won't—if it is to be all won't——"

"Then of course it must be won't with me," said I, finishing her speech for her.

They stayed a while chatting, and before leaving

asked me again to dine with them. I should have been well pleased to accept the invitation, but considered I would stand a better chance of preserving their esteem and affection if, now that I was out of the house, I did not dose them too often with my company; and besides, if this courtship of mine was going to involve much waiting—whether it came to anything or not—should I not be dining at their house often enough? “If ever you want the phaeton, or feel disposed for a canter, you have only to send a message, Jack,” said Sophie, and, then, giving me a tender sentimental shake of the hand, my cousins went away.

I killed the rest of the day in wandering about Bristol, hanging about the docks, where the vessels and the hands at work upon them stirred up scores of old memories, and I also expended a few shillings in the purchase of a small collection of cheap novels. My uncle had put my name down at his club, but unfortunately Mr. Hawke was a member of it, and the fear of meeting him was quite enough to keep me clear of those premises. It immeasurably consoled me, however, to reflect that Florence Hawke knew that I was living in Bristol. Why, even if she had no feeling for me, outside liking me as an easy-going, light-hearted young fellow, she was bound to take an interest in a man who had surrendered his pleasure and comfort as his uncle’s guest, because of her papa’s fears and priggish

jealousy, and had gone to dwell in a twopenny lodging that he might be near her and able to catch a glimpse of her now and again. It is true that the thought of young Morecombe living in her house, enjoying her incomparable society, and being backed in his assaults upon her heart by the battery of her father's wishes, was excessively distracting to a lover so utterly helpless as I was; but I consoled myself by reflecting that she had spoken of the young fellow as a fool, that she had never expressed an atom of regard for him, and that my cousins were fully of opinion that Mr. Hawke would never induce his daughter to accept the man as a husband.

But taking it all round, I give you my word it was anything but the jolliest time of my life. Often would I pull out Florence's likeness and look at it, and ask myself why fate had ordained that she should cross my path, instead of allowing me to remain the gay-hearted youth who was kicking his heels, up to a recent period, about the West End of London, and turning in night after night without a trouble to ruffle the serenity of his simple mind? During the evening that followed my cousins' visit, I very well remember sticking Miss Florence's photograph on the top of a hot water-jug, the open lid of which supported its back and enabled me to view it with my hands in my pockets; and there it stood up before me like a fetish—but oh, ship-

mates, the beautiful drooping profile ! the lovely swell of the figure ! the rich, tender speaking eye downwards bent, hollowest phantasm of the exquisite reality as it was!—whilst I soliloquized as though I were making my devotions before the goddess ; and I well recollect wondering whether it would not be better for me to end this business by packing my portmanteau and going away to London next morning, instead of languishing in these lodgings, dependent upon my cousins for the privilege of even seeing Miss Florence, and of eventually, maybe, sinking into a species of idiocy, only to be rewarded in the end by receiving a piece of Mrs. Florence Morecombe's wedding-cake to put under my pillow. My love, thought I, is but a milk-tooth now, a small pull will whip it away ; but if I let it grow, it will become a lumping big grinder with several enormous fangs, so that the very devil himself might fail to haul it out ; and if it should decay—heavens ! what agony must I suffer ! What ought I to do then ? But guess what sort of common sense I had in those days when you notice that I tried to reason, with Florence's lovely face mounted on a hot-water jug plump under my nose ! How was it possible for me to form any safe resolution, to act like a man who was determined to be master of himself, whilst the image of the sweetest of faces and figures—the portrait of the woman I adored—stood up in

front of me to paralyze every little thumping struggle my heart gave to regain its liberty? No, thought I, snatching up the beautiful picture and kissing it, it's too late—I'm in for it—I'll keep all fast! And pocketing the photograph, I drank to my own health, lighted a pipe, and fell to one of the half-dozen novels I had purchased.

CHAPTER X.

MY UNCLE DAMPS MY HOPES.

NOTHING particular, as shipmasters say when they depose to disasters, happened for the next three days. I recollect calling at my uncle's house and finding everybody out, also killing a morning by a trip to Portishead, attending a morning service in the cathedral, in the vague, utterly idle hope of seeing Miss Hawke there. Had I been in Bristol merely as a lounging visitor, with an unoccupied mind on the look-out for amusement, I should have immensely enjoyed the old city; for it is as picturesque a place as a man need wish to see, full of gable-roofed houses belonging to ancient times, and quaint side-streets; and, above all, it gives you the interests of a big port close to your door in the shape of ships, which come up into the heart of the town and mingle their spars and flags with chimney-pots and steeples.

But my mind never was unoccupied. I wandered about like a dog that has lost its master, staring at

people and into carriages in hopes of catching a glimpse of Florence Hawke, with my mind so full of plans and plots, of hopes and fears, of determination and irresolution, that had Bristol been built by the slaves of Aladdin in a night, I should have mooned and gaped along the pavements without giving the least attention to the miracle.

On the afternoon of the third day I returned to my lodgings, having been down to Portishead to have a look at the old ocean, and found my little parlour fogged with tobacco smoke, in the midst of which sat my uncle blowing clouds from a large meerschaum. This was his first visit, and when I entered, instead of saying "How do you do?" he exclaimed, "Shut the door behind ye, Jack. I don't want your landlady to hear me laugh. Man! you must be deeply in love to put up with this. Dash my buttons! you don't call this a *room*, do ye? Why, if Florence was to catch sight of this match-box, darned if I don't think she'd be giving you her hand and heart slick away off out of mercy so as to get you out of this butter-box of a hole."

"Small as it is," said I, "I'm glad to see you in it. How are you?" and we shook hands, after which I opened the window.

"And what headway are you making?" said he.

"I'm very comfortable here," I replied. "Not equal to *your* palace, but good enough for a spell—clean, quiet, respectable, and cheap."

"I don't mean that," said he. "What are you doing in this love business? Are you forging ahead at all?"

"I can't say I am," I replied, feeling exceedingly foolish.

"Have you met Florence since you left us?" he asked.

"Not once."

"Have you *seen* her then?"

"No."

"Neither met her nor seen her!" he cried.
"What are you doing then—writing to her?"

I shook my head; these questions were abominably mortifying, and made me feel horribly absurd.

"Then," said he, "in the name of Jerusalem, what are you stopping in this rat-hole for?" looking around him. "Has any one invented a new method of making love since I was young, by which two people can grow desperately attached by never seeing, by never meeting, by never hearing, and never writing to each other? If not, then come back to my house, Jack; don't go and ruin the reputation of the Seymours for intellect by hiding in a snail-shell and pretending that you are courting."

My dignity was touched. "Pardon me," I observed somewhat loftily, "you knew the policy I intended to adopt. I am content to wait. Mr. Alphonso Hawke is not an apple-tree that I can

turn to and shake him until the particular fruit I want falls at my feet. His daughter knows I love her: she knows I am living in Bristol for her sake."

"But what's *that* got to do with it?" he exclaimed. "If you never meet her, if you never see her, if you don't correspond with her, what's to come of your lodging in this oyster-shell?"

"I am in my cousins' hands," said I. "Florence Hawke and I *will* meet, depend upon it; and when we do, you bet that Jack Seymour hasn't withdrawn into this oyster-shell, as you call it, for nothing."

"Look here, my lad," said he, speaking very kindly, and with a touch of apology in his voice that was almost alarming, "I don't want to discourage you—you know that."

"Yes, I know that."

"There's no reason," he continued, "why you shouldn't win this girl—though, mind, you'll do nothing by sitting down in this snuff-box of a chamber with a pipe in your mouth, or taking a turn along a few fathoms of pavement. D'ye remember that I lectured you once on sincerity? Well, it eased my mind, and ever since I've somehow felt that you're to be trusted: my notion being that if Florence chooses to fancy you, she'll find you an A 1 husband, built above the usual requirements, copper-fastened, and something fit to handle. Money she oughtn't to want; and if her father cuts her off, you must go to work and double your in-

come, and that'll do for the present. So you see, my boy, I don't want to discourage you."

"But what do you want to say, then?" said I, wondering what he was driving at now that he had made all these admissions.

"Why," said he, looking a bit nervous, "you just now spoke of your cousins helping you. Well, *I* have no objection. I have my own theories of life, and do not know why I should be expected to applaud Mr. Hawke's views and support them. You're a gentleman—poor, but not a beggar. You have something to offer Florence, even if she came to you without a stiver. Isn't that so?"

"I have two hundred and fifty a year," said I.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "and youth also, which is always worth money. If you were a dissolute fellow, if you were a twopenny rascal, if I thought you weren't worth the love of such a girl as Florence, if I reckoned you'd like to get her, not for her heart's sake, but for what she'd bring along with her, does any man who knows me suppose I would lift a finger to help you to foul old Hawke by running athwart his hawse? My boy, if I lifted anything it would be my foot, to give ye a hoist out of the way of the charming girl. Mind, Jack, I don't want to say anything to discourage you."

"I'm following you anxiously," said I.

"The fact is, nephew, your aunt and I are not agreed. She is for respecting Mr. Hawke's wishes

to the extent of your doing nothing to bother him. She is very fond of you, Jack—ay, proud of you, my boy, as a relative; but she doesn't think it would be consistent with our dignity for your cousins to meddle in a business that's already caused old Hawke to insult us."

"I do not blame her," said I.

"It is not my fault," continued he, growing more and more apologetic, and looking very sorry. "I it was who told you you might count upon your cousins. But my wife objects, and she must have her way. She has consented to their calling on Florence, but on the distinct understanding that they take no messages, no notes."

"You may depend upon it," said I speaking coolly, but feeling frightfully chagrined, "that her requests are law to me. I beg that you will give her my love, and assure her that the same resolution that forced me from her hospitable house will enable me most strictly to respect her wishes."

"For God's sake!" he burst out, "don't be too polite, Jack, or you'll make me think you're satirical."

"No, no," said I, "I am too fond of you all to try my clumsy fist at satire."

"I know you are, and we're equally fond of you; and what I want to know now is, whether, seeing that it wouldn't be proper for your cousins to help you in this job, it is worth your while to go on

bothering yourself over it. Act sensibly, man ! Give up these lodgings, come to my house, and when you've had enough of us, return to London."

"A thousand thanks for your kindness, uncle ; but—what !" I shouted, "surrender my love, my hopes, my chances, by living in a house on the understanding that I must never meet Florence Hawke, or, if I meet her, that I must never speak to her or take notice of her lest I should excite her father's suspicions of your neighbourliness, and lead him to suppose you are keeping me with you for the purpose of annoying him ! My dear uncle, you once called me a swab ; do you really think I *am* one ?"

He laughed heartily, and said, "Well, well ; I see how it is. One must needs go when the devil drives. How you'll manage to get along I don't know ; but I dare say in its time love has triumphed over bigger difficulties than any you're likely to encounter. Indeed, I once knew a man who, to come at the object of his affections, had not only to fight his own and the lady's family—the two families combined mustering no less than two-and-twenty souls—but the family of the rector of the parish, the family of a justice of the peace, and the relations of a medical widower. He beat 'em all. His triumph was wonderful ! There was no bolting, no scudding away : he married the girl calmly and legitimately ; and you may make an Irish hash of me, Jack, if the wedding guests didn't consist of all

the people he had, in a moral sense, knocked on the head, and over whose bodies he had crawled on his road to the altar. Take that fable to heart," said he, "and moralize it."

My conversation with him, however, had not left me in a very moralizing mood. He lingered a little, talking and laughing—in truth he saw that he had made me despondent, and wanted to leave me in better spirits—and tried to persuade me to dine with him that day. I declined, for I was not at all in the humour to enjoy his hospitality, but promised to spend the following afternoon and evening at his house; and this being settled he went away, urging me with his last words to quit those lodgings, and never to suffer any woman in this wide world to make me unhappy whilst I remained a bachelor, as it was time enough for a man to begin to feel miserable when he was married.

I had counted so fully upon the good offices of my cousins, upon their willingness to convey letters and messages, upon their womanly capacity of interesting Florence in me by their talk of my devotion, my admiration of her, and the like, that upon my word, mates, the thought that their help was lost to me affected me to such a degree, that hang me if I am not ashamed to think of it. What was I to do *now*? No doubt I had the sympathy of my relations, but their neutrality was almost as bad as active hostility, so that practically I stood

alone, I was without a friend, without any means of communicating with my darling, unless indeed I boldly wrote to her at her papa's house, which might have been a resolution very easy to carry out, but not for a moment to be entertained if I valued my self-respect and hers ; and I was therefore deprived of all chance of keeping myself alive in her memory. Under such circumstances there is probably not one man in a hundred who would not have withdrawn whilst his wounds were still small. But my nature was an obstinate one, and sanguine too, a compound not often met. Besides this, I loved the girl from the very bottom of my heart with a boyish intensity I like to remember. I also valued my relatives' opinion, and guessed if I turned tail at this juncture they would ever after look upon me as a very insincere poor creature. These and a hundred such thoughts determined me to "hold on all," as we say at sea, to put my faith in chance, to be patient—in short, to play with Dame Fortune the old nursery game of shutting my eyes and opening my mouth and seeing what I should get. It might be a lollipop, or it might be a dose of jalap, but whatever it was, I would swallow it.

Yet for all that, the worry, the disappointment, the real distress of mind I was in, coupled with the heat of the weather and the smallness of the room about which I kept lurching for some time after my

uncle had gone away, with my head full of simmering fancies, threw me into a kind of fever ; and then there came into me such a desperate, crazy longing to see Florence Hawke—to catch even the merest glimpse of her—that without any kind of plan in my mind I pulled on my hat and set sail in the direction of Clifton. I did not, however, know how tired my ramble about Portishead had made me until I was mounting the steep road which would carry me to Clifton Lodge, and compelled by fatigue to walk slowly, I had plenty of leisure for reflection. What did I mean to do ? To pull the bell, and ask if Miss Hawke was at home ? Stand at the gate and peep through the bars ? Was I anxious to give old Hawke an opportunity of pronouncing an opinion on me through the medium of his flunkeys ?

In truth, when I began to ask myself where I was bound to, and what I hoped to do when I got there, I found an irresolution creeping upon me. When a man is really beloved of his sweetheart there are few things he can do which are likely to make him ridiculous in her eyes—at least, that's my notion, and of course, I may be wrong ; but I fancy no one will doubt that until a fellow has won a girl's heart he runs many risks of being laughed at by her. Should Miss Hawke catch me hanging about the road in front of her house and peeping at the windows like a burglar settling his little plans,

would she be amused? She might, it is true, be affected by this instance of my devotion, or she might think I was acting very ridiculously. An alternative of this kind is a very serious thing. These were my thoughts as I marched toilsomely up that hill, and these were the considerations which caused me after a while to stop, and then march down again.

No one who has been in love but will sympathize with the feelings which mastered me at this period, and follow with emotion the various postures of mind into which my passion forced me.

CHAPTER XI.

I POUR OUT MY SOUL.

WHAT sort of man was Mr. Reginald Morecombe ? Was he short or tall ? Good-looking or plain ? A real fool or with as much sense as most youths have ? That he wore his hair parted down the middle, that he dressed himself in stick-up collars (no great vice), that he used an eye-glass, and talked of blood with the complacency of a gentleman whose private conviction is that people of humble extraction wander through life with their veins filled up with water, I had heard ; but these points were vague enough. I had never seen him, which was not curious considering that he had been laid up with a sprained ankle pretty nearly ever since his arrival at Clifton ; but not the less was my curiosity exceedingly keen, so that next to Miss Hawke the person I was most anxious to have a good look at was the youth her father wanted her to marry.

My mind was full of speculations about this man

as next morning I walked to Clifton to spend the day with my relatives; and it was therefore a coincidence in its way that I had not been walking ten minutes when I spied Mr. Hawke's carriage standing opposite a bookseller's shop. The sight of the men's livery, which I had good reason to remember, fluttered me exceedingly; but I had to come abreast of the vehicle before I could see who was in it, and as I did so Mr. Hawke came out of the shop and said something to the young fellow who was sitting in the carriage. The old chap did not see me. I walked hurriedly by, taking but a short peep at the young man, who of course would be no other than Mr. Morecombe. That peep, sharp and brief as it was, did not make me feel very happy, for I am bound to say that Mr. Morecombe was a decidedly good-looking man, apparently about eight-and-twenty, with a large tawny moustache and a well-shaped nose. There was a glass in his eye, and he wore the stick-ups my uncle had jeered at. He was dressed in a suit of tweed, with yellow gloves, plenty of shirt-sleeve, and a white deer-stalking hat. Yet there was something mighty affected, I thought, in his pose as he leaned back with a cigarette between his fingers.

I walked quickly past, as I have said, never troubling myself to look behind; but let me repeat, mates, the sight of that man made me feel

uncomfortable. He was certainly not the sort of individual I had fancied him. I had figured a somewhat idiotic person, smooth-faced, a sort of compromise between man and woman, with the assurance of the one and the vanity of the other. Instead of which, the villain had a masculine appearance, was of my height, as I reckoned by his body as he sat in the carriage, unless his legs were short (which I hoped), and was not without breadth of shoulders. I had noticed with a spasm of jealousy and wrath the polite, exceedingly gracious manner with which old Hawke had smiled on the youth as he came out of the shop.

Mr. Morecombe, I thought as I stepped out, walking fast in my abstraction, is good-looking, is gentlemanly-looking, he is well connected, his wife will be Lady Morecombe, he may not be well off, but he cannot be poorer than I. Suppose he *is* the fool my relatives—ay, and Florence Hawke—call him; suppose he talks nonsense about blood; suppose he is a puppy by nature and the meanest of creatures in intellect—whoever he marries will some day be “her ladyship”; he has a pretty figure for a carriage, or a saddle, or a drawing-room, and he is no doubt capable of running very glibly over a whole catalogue of titled aunts and uncles and cousins. What more does pompous old Hawke want? What chance should I stand, who am little better than a shell-back, whose father was a

lawyer, who have no pretensions to Mr. Reginald Morecombe's elegant military style, his beautiful moustache, his small hands, and general noble ball-room appearance ?

I arrived at my uncle's house in a very dejected, uncomfortable mood, partly induced by the view I had obtained of Mr. Morecombe, and partly by thoughts about my aunt, who I considered was acting very unkindly in prohibiting her daughters from lending me a hand in my courtship. As I entered the gate I plumped up against Sophie, who was unmistakably hanging about to intercept me.

"Jack," she said, as I stopped to shake hands with her, "I know you wonder why neither Amelia nor I have called upon you."

"Not at all," I answered. "Your papa was with me yesterday, and he explained how matters stand. Why should you call? You have nothing to tell me."

"It is not my fault," cried the amiable girl, speaking with a distressed face; "I had made all arrangements to visit Florence and have her here, as you know—purely for your sake, but mamma strictly prohibited Amelia and me from mentioning your name to Florence, or acting in any way as a go-between. What was I to do? I am obliged to obey mamma."

"Of course, of course," said I. "Don't let this trouble you. I fully appreciate all your good

intentions. It's a blow, I admit, to be deprived of your help. But until I positively hear that Florence Hawke has accepted young Morecombe—who, by the way, I have just sighted for the first time—or until I know that the love I offered her on that seat there," said I, pointing, "is objectionable to her, I'll go on hoping, Sophie, I'll go on waiting; for who knows what may happen?" and so saying I put my hand through her arm, and in this friendly manner we walked to the house.

My aunt welcomed me very kindly, and I took care to put so much warmth into my manner that it was impossible she could suspect how annoyed I was with her for allowing her regard for old Hawke's opinion to interfere with my chance of wooing his lovely daughter. I had hoped that no reference to the business in any shape or form would have been made, and had it rested with my aunt and cousins nothing probably would have been said; but my uncle, who spoke whatever came into his head, tumbled us all into the topic at lunch by asking Amelia if she had seen Miss Hawke lately. My aunt tried to catch his eye to make a face at him, but he would not look.

"I saw her yesterday, but only to nod to," replied Amelia.

"Does anybody know how young Morecombe is getting on?" continued my uncle; "how's his sprain—can any one tell?"

"It should be well by this time," said Sophie contemptuously.

"I'm not so sure," exclaimed my uncle; "a sprain is a bad job. I have known a man to be laid up for twelve weeks with a twisted ankle."

"I saw him in the Hawkes' carriage as I came here," said I; "his sufferings did not seem acute."

"Was that the first time you had ever seen him?" asked my aunt. I replied that it was.

"What d'ye think of him?" said my uncle.

"That he's a decidedly good-looking fellow, with a very gentlemanly appearance." Sophie seemed to regard me with astonishment. My aunt said, "It is very honourable in you to praise him, Mr. Jack. He is certainly handsome to look at—"

"From a distance," interrupted Sophie. "But," continued my aunt, "when you get to know him and converse with him his looks seem to fade away. I am afraid it is because he has very little intellect."

"The fact is, Jack," said my uncle, "his beauty founders in his imbecility. The moment you stir up his mind his appearance gets swamped and sinks. Yet I like to hear ye admire the man; it's a nautical touch that pleases me."

"Only Mr. Hawke could endure so silly a person as a guest," observed Amelia.

"Do not let us talk of Mr. Hawke, dear," said

my aunt. "Sophie, pass the sherry to your cousin, my love."

"Before we shelve old Hawke, Sophie," said my uncle in the manner of one who rises after a dinner to make a speech, "I want to say a word. I told Jack yesterday why you object to the girls meddling in his love affairs; he quite understands, as I explained to you, my dear. It is not because you like old Hawke, nor because you approve of his wish to marry his child to an ass, nor because you would not be delighted to see Florence Hawke become Mrs. Jack Seymour; but because you think it's right that people should do as they'd like to be done by—by which I mean that if you were carrying out some marriage speculation for Sophie there, you would not be pleased if Hawke's nephew (supposing he had one) stepped in, backed by Hawke and his family, to stop or thwart or bother you in your little game. There need be no *feeling* on the subject. Jack is a young man of sense; aren't you, Jack?"

All this was distressing enough to me, and I could only blush and try to smile and look amiable. My aunt, dragged into a topic she had not wanted to meddle with, was forced to speak.

"I am sorry," said she to me, "to have felt obliged—and I really *have* felt obliged—to say or do anything that—that you might think not kind. My husband knows, and so do Sophie and Amelia,

that I would be very glad to see you the accepted lover of Florence Hawke. Do not imagine I wonder at your admiration of her or that you should be in love, for I greatly admire Florence myself and have a warm affection for her. But it was out of the question that Mr. Hawke should be allowed to suppose that we were abetting you against his wishes ; nor, in my opinion, would my daughters be acting with propriety in calling at Clifton Lodge after what has passed, and, under the mask of visiting as *friends*, helping you in your—your——”

“Affair dee cooer—put it politely,” said my uncle.

“And so virtually acting as the enemies of Mr. Hawke’s,” concluded my aunt, who was exceedingly nervous and extended her hand to Sophie for the fan the girl wore slung by a lanyard to her waist.

“There’s no reasoning against that,” said my uncle. “Girls, your mother’s right. We all of us wish Jack plenty of luck ; he deserves it, and, in my opinion, he’ll get it ; but he must haul alone. Yes, my lad, it must be a single-handed job. It’s a pity, but women are the best judges of what’s proper and decorous in behaviour, and what your aunt says we’re bound to endorse, both of us.”

Once more I say all this was very distressing, besides being flat, stale, and unprofitable, for it was going over old ground ; however, I put on a

pleasant face, thanked my aunt for her good wishes, apologized for having been the cause of Mr. Hawke's rudeness, and by backing and filling managed to go clear of the confoundedly narrow channel into which my uncle's candid soul had warped me, and then, with a dexterous twist, changed the subject.

After luncheon Sophie came to the window of the room in which her father and I sat smoking, and asked if I would take a walk with her. I at once said "Yes," and looked at her eagerly, fancying that she intended to put me in the way of meeting Florence. She read my thoughts and shook her head, and said significantly, "Only for a walk, Jack, as far as Observatory Hill, just to kill an hour." "No mischief hatching, I hope," says my uncle, who was half asleep. "I wish there was, in the sense you mean," thought I, greatly disappointed by Sophie's shake of the head. "Yes, I should be very glad to take a stroll," I said to my cousin, with whom in that sentimental time I took great pleasure in conversing: so she went away, and in about twenty minutes' time reappeared dressed for the walk. My uncle was sound asleep, snoring bravely, with a quantity of cigar ash on his trowsers, and his arms hanging all abroad.

"Won't Amelia join us?" I asked Sophie as we stepped on to the lawn. She answered that her sister had been walking in the morning and felt tired, and that her mamma was lying down in

her bedroom. I dare say neither of them knew that she was going for a walk with me ; she wanted to have my emotions and woes to herself—to enjoy me alone, as if I were a love story in three volumes. Indeed, my cousin Sophie had a truly romantic turn of mind, a keen and native relish of all matters which concern the heart. How she managed to endure life without having some *great secret* of her own I cannot imagine. Perhaps she had ; and if so I should feel disposed to bet that he had melancholy eyes and was considerably in debt.

We walked along very slowly, and as we walked we conversed on the one topic that at that period absorbed the whole of my slender stock of understanding. "I can only repeat, Jack," says she, "that I am deeply vexed at not being able to help you as I should like. I had made such capital plans. Again and again Florence could have been at our house when you arrived—quite by accident, of course. Then she and I could have taken drives, and met you in the most unexpected manner. But mamma's wishes are law," and the dear thing sighed with all her might.

"Sophie," said I, "at lunch you heard me say I had seen young Morecombe in the Hawkes' carriage. I spoke of him lightly, for I want nobody but you to know *all* that I feel. But the truth is, Sophie, the sight of that man has made

me miserable; I had no notion he was so good-looking."

"He is not good-looking," she replied scornfully; "it's your jealousy that makes him formidable. At all events, if he's good-looking in *your* opinion, depend upon it he does not come up to a woman's ideas of a handsome man."

"You merely say this to comfort me," I mumbled.

"I say it because it is true," she exclaimed. "Were you to talk to him you'd find him positively ugly; he has not an atom of expression, he has a most sickly, conceited smile, he says 'aw,' like old Mr. Hawke, but much more often, and 'heear' for 'hear' and 'beear' for 'beer'; and he also stammers a little. If Florence were with us she'd agree in every word I say. At all events, *she* does not think him good-looking."

"Are you sure of that?" I asked, longing to believe her and thoroughly doubting what she said at the same time—a truly miserable condition of mind to be in.

"Are not *you* sure?" she replied. "Why, she called him a fool to your face once; don't you remember? And do you think a woman would speak like that of a man she admired?"

"Oh, but she was talking of his brains, not of his appearance," said I. "Confound the fellow! I wish I had never seen him. I never supposed

that he was much more than a soft, clean-faced, under-sized fop."

"He's not much more, whatever you may think," said she ; "and if Florence does not admire him—which I know to be the case ; didn't she once say to me he had a most inane countenance ?—why will you allow such trifling matters as a moustache and an eye-glass to worry you ? Why, at that rate an umbrella or a walking-stick will be disturbing your peace of mind next. Depend upon it, Mr. Reginald Morecombe is not to Florence's taste."

"What *is* to her taste ? Can you imagine ?" said I, letting conviction creep into me bit by bit, like an eel working its way into the mud. Here my warm-hearted cousin did me the honour to closely describe Jack Seymour. Yes ; she said that what Florence liked was a Roman nose—not a hook, but aumpkin or outrigger of the proper classic kind ; plenty of brown hair, elegantly tossed off the manly brow as if recently combed by a gale of wind ; a tolerable mouth, fairish teeth, and a small honest moustache—not a great heap of hair, which might conceal nobody could tell what, and which when shaved off might leave a most dreadful and wonderful change behind. And so my kind cousin talked on, making beauties of my imperfections and overpowering me with the glimpses of my own charms she enabled me to

snatch. It was hard not to believe all she said ; my vanity, my hopes, my love were all on her side. But her adamantine amiability, that was proof against my intolerable egotism,—that did not crumble and fall down before the battery of such questions as, “And you really think she admires me more than Mr. Morecombe ?” “ And you honestly believe, Sophie, that she likes me ?” “ And your opinion is that if I could only manage to meet her a few times it would end in my winning her love ?” “ And you are sure that her father will never induce her to accept Mr. Morecombe ?” I can only recall with veneration and amazement. How I plied her, poor girl ! Sometimes I apologized; sometimes I would say, “ ‘Pon my word, I am very unreasonable ; I have no right to be worrying you in this fashion. I ought not to bore you with all this talk.’ ” But whether it was that she enjoyed the conversation and would not let me drift out of it, or that I could not find anything else to talk about, it always happened that I regularly returned to the subject of Florence Hawke, what she thought of me, my chances, what I ought to do, and the like.

We were wandering along side by side, like a pair of lovers deep in conversation, when she suddenly caught hold of my arm, came to a dead stop, compelling me to halt likewise, and exclaimed with a sort of consternation in her manner, “ Good

gracious, Jack, there's Florence in front of us ! and there's Emily in that Bath chair." We were somewhere about where the St. Vincent Rocks Hotel now stands ; there was no suspension bridge in those days. I could see some distance along the road, that had a railing down one side of it, leaving a wide margin of edge where the precipitous cliff fell, and about a couple of hundred paces ahead of us, there, sure enough, was a Bath chair, dragged by a man with some silver on his hat, and walking close alongside of it was Florence Hawke, though, had not Sophie told me it was she, I should certainly not have recognized her at that distance. They were going our way, and their backs were towards us. The Bath chair went along very slowly, and when we stopped, Miss Hawke stopped and looked towards the river, and then rejoined her sister.

"Let us go on, Sophie, let us go on !" I exclaimed, hearing my heart drumming in my ears as if Punch and Judy were not far off.

"What are we to do, Jack ?" cried she. "Ought we to join them ? What will mamma say ?"

"For heaven's sake, don't let us lose sight of them," I replied, catching hold of her arm and obliging her to walk. "We can argue the matter moving, can't we ? What *can* your mamma say ? She doesn't want you to *cut* Miss Hawke. This

meeting is purely accidental—it is what I have been longing and praying for—don't think of anybody but me at this moment." And tightening my clutch of her arm I forced her to step out.

"Well, as you say, it's purely accidental," said the good-natured girl, fast losing her breath. "I certainly cannot be disobeying mamma by speaking to Florence when we meet, although you are with me."

"And you *have* met her," cried I, "after an Irish fashion, certainly; but we'll make it a proper meeting."

As we drew near I actually trembled with excitement and nervousness. I never gave the circumstance of Miss Emily being with her sister a thought. All that I felt was that I was going to meet and see and speak to the girl I was deeply in love with, and whom I had done nothing but think of, and dream of, and worry over, and speculate upon ever since the first night I had set foot in Clifton. Why wouldn't she look round and see us coming? This stern-chase doubled my nervousness, more especially as the pair of us threatened to blunder alongside short of breath and scare the darling by our sudden apparition and invasion. We were within twenty feet of the Bath chair when Emily turned her head and spied us. Perhaps she did not immediately recognize us, for she took another short squint before speaking to her sister.

Instantly Florence stopped and looked; for a moment she hung in the wind, I fancied, as if she did not know what to do; then with a bright smile she advanced, gave Sophie a kiss, and extended her hand to me.

Mates, shaking hands with a girl you love is a wonderful sensation. I could scarcely let go of the soft, tender, velvet-like gloved fingers; and frightened, shy, palpitating, and excited as I was, the delight kindled in my face I could guess at by seeing the effect of it in hers.

"I am so glad to see you, Sophie," said she. "How is it you have not called? You owe me a visit, you know," and she smiled archly.

But the fellow that was hauling the Bath chair along had come to a stand; Miss Emily had to be saluted, and we went to her. She looked at me with amazement as I raised my hat. She did not attempt to disguise her wonder. Nothing was more certain than that she had not the least idea I was still in Bristol; whence, quick as lightning, I inferred that Florence had kept the fact of my having taken lodgings in the neighbourhood a secret from her father and sister. A noble augury for me, as what lover will doubt? Could the poor delicate creature have had her way, she would have ordered the flunkey to wheel her home. This was as plain as mud in a wine-glass by her first movement of surprise at seeing me and the

marked coolness of her manner immediately afterwards. But, Heaven be praised! she was too young to be dangerous in that way. Sophie, who was anxiously smiling and red as a cook with the heat, for I had dragged her along without ceremony, said, "Don't let us keep you standing. We are going your way;" and forthwith the silver-hatted gentleman touched his hat, bent his back, and off we started.

We all kept together at the beginning. I had very little to say, and indeed just then was hardly able to do more than look. Occasionally Emily would stare at me as if I had just clambered out of the river over the cliff; but I took no notice: I had no eyes but for Florence. Could I pretend to know how she was dressed? what sort of hat she wore? what colour her parasol was? Depend upon it, a man is not very far gone when he notes his girl's attire. Why, confound him, whatever she has on will be in the most delicious taste in the world when he *is* in love, and that is all he will be able to say about it. What I remember of Florence that day was her face and figure. It was her beauty that clothed her—nothing more.

Well, we all tried to appear at the first going off as if nothing whatever had happened—as if I were not in love, as if Florence didn't know I was in love, as if Alphonso Hawke were on the friendliest terms with the Seymours, as if there were no

Morecombe, no Bristol lodgings, no blood wanted—no nothing. Emily was horribly cool, certainly, and the eagerness in her soul to tell papa was visible in her sickly lineaments. But we did not mind her; Florence talked of the weather, I of the dust, and Sophie of the curate of St. Andrew's. At last Sophie said something to Emily, first stealing a peep at me that I might see my chance. My heart set off afresh; but I was resolved that nervousness should not hinder me. A time had come for which I had been praying; so girding up my loins (in an intellectual sense, of course), I took a lateral step that brought my arm against Florence's, and said in a low voice, "I was afraid I should never see you again."

She coloured up—how could she remember I had told her that I loved her and not appreciate the significance of this meeting and of every word I could say in her private ear?—and answered, "I heard from Sophie that you had taken lodgings in Bristol. I hope you are comfortable, though you don't deserve to be for giving up your kind relatives' home."

"I did that for your sake," said I.

"I know you did," she answered, "and I am sorry to have been the cause."

(I saw Emily staring at us. Meanwhile Sophie talked fast to her.)

"I would do anything for your sake," said I.

"The one hardship is the rare chance of meeting you. Why is your father prejudiced against me? He does not know me. Could I help falling in love with you? He is to blame for having for a daughter the loveliest girl in the world."

"Don't talk nonsense, Mr. Seymour," said she, turning her face aside and smiling. (We had dropped about a fathom astern of the Bath chair and right in the wake of it; so Emily could not go on looking without straining her neck.) And then raising her sweet eyes to me, she said, "If a landsman talked to me as you do, I should walk away, I should be angry. But I can forgive a very great deal in a young man who has been to sea as a sailor."

"And why? because if he's a real sailor he'll speak the truth—as I do. Do you doubt my sincerity? Do you think I am only flattering you? Heaven forgive you, if you suppose that! I can tell you that you have made me the most wretched creature in existence. I am in love with you, and my love puts you a thousand leagues further away from me than were I to like you only as an acquaintance. For, before, we could meet, I could talk to you, I could be in your presence and look at you; now I go on day after day with nothing upon earth to console me but your likeness."

She was a little scared by my impassioned man-

ner, which put a kind of impetuousness into my voice.

"There is no need for you to be wretched," said she.

"Why do you say that?" cried I, grasping at the straw. "Only tell me that I may hope—I ask for no more now—and you'll make me the gladdest fellow in the world."

"I'll tell you nothing at all," she answered. "I wish you would not think of me. Indeed, Mr. Seymour, I ought not to talk to you."

"See here, Miss Hawke—no, I'll call you Florence—you may not like it; but I'm determined to get one happy memory out of all this worry; will you answer a question?"

"You mustn't call me Florence," said she smiling.

"Why not?" said I. "How cruel you are. You will not yield an inch." She returned no answer. "Since you object I will not call you Florence."

"You may say it once, but only once," said she, turning her head away again.

"May I put something before it."

"What?" she inquired, rather breathlessly.

"May I say 'darling Florence'?" I cried, feeling that if that abominable Bath chair were out of sight I should seize her hand.

"Oh no, certainly not," she exclaimed, honestly

frightened. "Oh, Mr. Seymour—you told me I would not give you an inch, and now you are wanting to take a whole mile!"

"Well, I'll not *call* you darling—I'll *think* it—I'll say Florence—will you answer a question?"

"I'll see when you ask it."

I put my face close to her and said, "Have I anything to fear from Mr. Reginald Morecombe?"

"I'll answer that," she replied at once; "though you are not nice in putting it in that way. My reply is 'No'!"

It was a wonder I did not burst into a horn-pipe.

"Oh, Florence!" I cried, "if you only knew—if you could only conceive the weight your answer takes off my mind."

"You have called me Florence twice," she exclaimed. "You are not fair. But let us join the others. Emily will be wondering——"

"Give me another moment," said I. "I may not meet you for a long time again, and I shall have nothing but this little conversation to live upon."

"I hope we shall meet soon then, for your sake," she exclaimed, "for how thin you will become if we don't!"

"I certainly shall—joking apart. Already I feel as if I were wronging Nature by not being a shadow. For my sake you hope we shall meet

soon, you say. Will you tell me how I am to meet you?"

"Indeed I cannot," she replied, "and therefore you ought to return to your uncle instead of living foolishly in apartments."

"But Mrs. Seymour respects your father's wishes," said I. "She thinks if we were to meet at her house Mr. Hawke would consider her unneighbourly. How miserable it is to be dependent on others!" And then, perceiving that she was making little feints to leave me, and would certainly be off in a moment or two, I exclaimed, "Florence, before we join the others will you tell me that you like me a little bit?"

She laughed and said, "Of course I like you a little bit;" and then afraid, no doubt, that this would lead to a larger question she made sail, and we drew alongside the Bath chair.

There's a good deal of imbecility in what I have written, my lads, but how am I to explain what an amount of 'bouting-ship there was in my courtship if I don't tell you what I said to my sweetheart when I made love to her? Besides, who expects good sense in love-making? Only Frenchmen court wittily, and shall I tell you why? because they are never in earnest. When John Bull offers his heart he means it. Yes, he kneels down in his great boots, makes a fool of himself, rumbles out nonsense in bad grammar; but there's conscience

in his twaddle. There was sincerity in mine; I meant all that I said, and so you have the best excuse I can offer for asking you to listen to this stuff.

We ranged alongside the Bath chair, as I have said, and Sophie at once quitted Emily for her sister. Nobody would have required a telescope to judge from Florence's and my appearance that we had been enjoying a rather earnest conversation. Her face was flushed, her eyes were bright, and there was an odd and fascinating expression of mirth, puzzlement, gratification, and *bother* upon her. Miss Emily was chillingly shy as I stepped up to her. And what a Bath chair was hers! a private turn-out, worthy of Alphonso, superbly lined and finished, and his confounded old goose or duck writ large on the stern and sides of it. But I was too mellow, too sanguine, too intoxicated by what had passed between Florence and me to allow this poor feeble little girl to repel me.

"I thought you had left Clifton?" said she.

"So I have," I replied, smiling with the energy of a shopman in my desire to look amiable.

"Yes," says she, "but you have not gone very far away."

"True," I observed, guessing that Sophie had told her I lodged in Bristol; "but I am so charmed by the scenery here," said I, hypocritically, casting my eyes around the prospect, "that

I could not prevail upon myself to return to London."

Of course she knew better; indeed she looked at me as much as to say, "You are a horrid story-teller. But never mind. Papa shall hear of all this." She was desperately hard to talk to. She gave me but little more than monosyllables. I asked after her health, and she returned me a reply that was like bidding me mind my own business. I then inquired after Mr. Morecombe's sprain, and this seemed to freeze her up. There was no chance for amiability here. I had hoped when we met at her house that she was a girl I could "get on with," as the phrase goes. But she was her papa's child; she had heard him talk about me; she was jealous, suspicious, peevish, anxious to be off and carry her tales with her, after the manner of others of her lovely sex, who in the sacred name of loyalty to papa and mamma and the family dignity oppose their pretty sisters when lovers heave in sight and bear down; and, hard as I tried, I could make nothing of her. Meanwhile Sophie and Florence had dropped astern and were deep in talk. I was anxious that they should not be interrupted, as I easily guessed that my cousin would make Jack Seymour the topic between them, and perhaps end in getting Florence to consent to an occasional *accidental* meeting with me; and this wish it was that they should have

plenty of leisure for conversation that held me close alongside the Bath chair, saying whatever came into my head, and by my incessant jabber fending off any desire Emily might have to order the fellow in the cockade to drag her away.

At last we came to a road that obliged us to say good-bye, unless we had a mind to accompany Florence and the Bath chair to Clifton Lodge, which would have been indiscreet. We stood talking a few minutes, and then Florence put out her hand to me. As I held it I whispered, "*Do* give me a chance of meeting you again soon?" "I will see," she answered. More than this it would not have been wise to say, for Emily's eyes were upon us; nor was I surprised that there should have been an expression of real wonder in them, for there was something in Florence's face as she said "I will see," and in her posture as I stood holding her hand, that must have been a revelation to the poor little suspicious invalid. I raised my hat, the wheels of the Bath chair went round, and Sophie and I turned our faces homewards.

"Well, Jack," said my cousin, "do you feel happier in your mind now that you have met Florence?"

"Ay, my darling, fit to stand upon my head," I exclaimed. "Isn't she——" And here I ran through adjectives enough to fill a page. "Sophie, I am positive she begins to like me seriously."

"So am I. But what do you think she told me?"

"Don't ask questions!" cried I in an agony of curiosity. "Whip it out, Sophie."

"Mr. Morecombe has proposed to her."

"The devil!" I exclaimed, coming to a dead stand. "When?"

"Last evening."

"And what was her answer?" said I, very nearly breathless.

"She gave him a flat refusal, Jack—a flat refusal!" shouted the delicious creature, breaking into a loud laugh and clapping her hands. There was an old woman in a large bonnet and a green veil, dragged along by a strong white dog, some distance behind us; but I did not heed her. In my transport I seized hold of Sophie, danced her into the middle of the road and back again on to the footpath; and so heedless was my ecstasy, that I not only paid no attention to her cries, but I did not even know that my hat had fallen off until I spied it in the road, whereupon I kicked it into the air, caught it as it fell, and laughing with all my might, took Sophie's arm and started afresh. She tried to look indignant at me for being so rough, but it would not do; my face must have been one surface of shining delight. She took a look and burst into such a fit of merriment that the tears rolled down her cheeks; so that

what with this coming on top of her involuntary waltz, she had a perfectly dissipated appearance, her hair in disorder, and her hat most ludicrously cocked.

"Flatly refused him! What d'ye think of *that*?" cried I, squeezing her plump arm. "Flatly refused him! What a noble girl! What a piece of news! And Alphonso?"

"She says that her father was in a great rage, and has scarcely opened his lips to her since."

"And Reginaldo, the proprietor of blood—what does *he* think?"

"She did not say much about him. Her words to me were, 'Sophie, I do not like him, and I will not have him. I am very sorry. It grieves me to oppose papa's wishes; but I *cannot* consent to link my life with that of a man who is stupid and conceited, for whose character I have not the least respect.'"

"Are not those beautiful sentiments?" I cried. "What a grand woman she is! Oh, Sophie, if I perish in the effort, I must go on struggling to win her."

"Didn't I say from the beginning she would never accept Mr. Morecombe?"

"You did," I replied; "and you are a grand woman too. But now that the youth's offer has been declined, I suppose he'll not be mean-spirited enough to go on remaining at old Hawke's house,

will he? Yet I saw him in Mr. Hawke's carriage this morning. Doesn't he mean to *go*, confound him? Is he so great a fool as not even to have any *instincts* as a man?"

"Florence thinks he will return to London when his foot is strong enough to stand on," replied Sophie. "But she quite gave me to understand that though he goes he'll not go for good. He has no intention of giving her up. Oh dear no! he! he! he! Men like Mr. Morecombe are not in the habit of taking no for an answer. Besides, her papa will not let himself be beaten without a desperate fight."

"Only let Florence complain to me that this fellow troubles her," said I between my teeth. "I'll leave him no brains to make love with. Let her complain to me."

"There's more news yet," said Sophie. "The day before yesterday Mr. Hawke received a letter from his sister, a spinster, named Damaris, who lives in Sydney, saying she was coming on a visit to them. The letter was posted a week or two before she sailed, so she'll be here soon."

"What do you call her?" I asked.

"Damaris—Aunt Damaris."

"A pretty name. And what does *she* want?"

"A change, I suppose. If she is like her brother, and sides with him, there'll be more affliction sore for Florence, I fear."

"Florence need only come to me," I exclaimed. "I'll protect her, though everybody in Australia was a relation and they all arrived this evening. Oh, that she would come at once, Sophie!"

"Upon my word, if things go on as they are, Jack, I believe you'll end in making her come," said she. "To render a girl's home miserable can hardly be the right way for a father to control her as he would like. Emily of course will tell her papa that she and Florence met us, and that will create another scene."

"Yes; and you are aware, Sophie, that Emily, and therefore of course old Hawke, did not know that I was living at Bristol?"

"Florence is a sly puss," she replied. "I was really more surprised by Emily's ignorance than she was surprised by seeing you. The fact of Florence keeping your movements a secret from her family looks well for you, Jack; though is it quite proper that she should do so?"

This was challenging my darling's integrity; so I said, of course it was proper. My movements were not supposed to form any part of Florence's business. What right had her father to expect that she should talk to him about me, and appear to know what I was doing when he had prohibited her from calling at my uncle's house for fear that she should meet me? It was not a question of her frankness or honesty. A girl might hear of

many things she would not trouble herself to repeat.

"Well, it may be as you say," said Sophie; "and, at any rate, if she has not been quite so candid with her papa as strict people might consider it her duty to be, the only person that ought to be blamed is Mr. Hawke. And now, Jack, what shall we say when we get home?"

"Whatever you please, my dear."

"We had better tell everything," said she.

"You will, whether we agree to hold our tongues or not," said I.

She laughed and exclaimed: "I must give Amelia the news about Mr. Morecombe. And mamma will be so interested! Besides, the meeting was entirely accidental—we can both solemnly declare that!"

"Ay, on our knees if required," said I. And as I spoke we arrived at my uncle's house.

CHAPTER XII.

I RECEIVE A VISIT.

OUR conversation at dinner that day, when the dessert was on the table and Cobb the man-servant had carried his large ears out of the room, was all about Florence and Mr. Morecombe. Of course Sophie had told her mamma and Amelia everything, and more than everything ; enough had transpired, as newspapers say, during the earlier stages of the dinner to make my uncle acquainted with the news, and therefore all that we had to do was to speculate and ejaculate, and wonder how Mr. Hawke would act *now*, and whether Aunt Damaris would side with her brother or her niece, and what would be the result when Emily told her papa that I was lodging in Bristol and had been walking with Florence—yes, and making love to her ?

I never should have supposed that my uncle was a man to take any interest in such parish matters as this ; and yet I assure you his curiosity was as lively as that of the others ; he thoroughly relished

the conversation, and asked questions and ventured ideas and passed his little jokes with surprising enjoyment of the subject. But my notion is that men have as keen a taste for small-talk as ladies, though they pretend that it is only women who like it and make it. Many a man have I caught listening attentively and with strong satisfaction depicted on his striking countenance to the cheapest gossip about Miss Jenkins's marriage, his lordship's elopement, the squire's meanness, and his reverence's quarrel with the churchwarden. I have seen bland old fellows sitting at the head of the tables helping the scandal talked by their wives and daughters by nods and inquiries and small insignificant observations. It makes me laugh to recall our conversation. The picture of that room rises: my uncle's hairy, kindly face, with his great Roman nose, like the beak of a flamingo, standing out over his moustache, and his small shrewd eyes full of merriment and curiosity; my aunt opposite him, handsome, well-dressed, trying to keep a firm hold of her sense of her duty towards her neighbours, and repeatedly letting go; Amelia, fat, confident and knowing, and Sophie, slightly hysterical, very poetical, and with a disposition to languish whenever a sentimental point was touched upon. I took particular notice that my uncle did not attempt to banter me. Indeed, his behaviour suggested that he was

inclined to view me as a considerable person who had achieved a remarkable conquest, and of whose future it was not easy to conjecture the extent and importance.

"If Sophie's right," said he, "and I don't know why she shouldn't be right, for she takes after her mother," looking at her contemplatively, "I should say, Jack, that Florence Hawke is in love with you."

"I have not the least doubt of it," exclaimed Sophie.

"Well, then," continued he, "if that be so, all that remains is to excite a feeling of affection for you in Alphonso Hawke, and you'll have nothing more to do than write out an impromptu speech and get it by heart ready to deliver when the old chap proposes your health at the breakfast."

"I am afraid," said my aunt, shaking her head, "that it will take Mr. Jack a long while to make Mr. Hawke fond of him."

"What *I'm* thinking of all the time is, what will Mr. Hawke say to Florence when he hears that she and Jack have been together this afternoon?" said Amelia.

"Do you think Emily will tell?" asked my uncle.

"Tell!" cried Sophie. "Oh, papa, the intention I saw in her face was so strong that it was enough to set the Bath chair rolling by itself to Clifton Lodge."

"I sincerely trust," observed my aunt, "that Mr. Hawke will quite understand, Sophie, that your meeting with Florence was purely accidental."

"Matters have come to such a pass," said my uncle, "that, let Mr. Hawke understand what he will, my opinion is he'll think the same. But I hope he'll not be unkind to his daughter."

"I hope not, too," said I, kindling.

"After all, what can he do?" asked Sophie.

"Ay, what can he do?" echoed my uncle. "Depend upon it, when a woman resolves for good or for ill she'll have her way, though her father should lock her up in the Tower of London and all the City Police should stand in the moat with their truncheons shouldered. What's that old song about locks, bolts, and bars? Isn't it called 'The Wolf'? Jack, there's no wolf in the world to equal love. Cupid indeed! D'ye know, I've but a poor opinion of the ancients for making a bit of a baby with a pair of wings on its back stand for the passion that moves the world. Egad! if an earthquake was a thing you could draw, that's the sort of split-'em-alive muddle I'd like to hang up as a correct portrait of love. Cupid—and bows and arrows! Blunderbusses, Jack! one hundred pounders, sir! bombshells and cannon balls, by thunder! *that's* what I'd give 'em!"

But I'll not linger over this dinner-table nor the conversation that took place at it. In all my life

I never was in such high spirits. The fact that Florence had flatly refused Mr. Morecombe was only one item in a catalogue of rapturous memories ; her manner, the pleasure she had shown on seeing me, our talk behind the Bath chair, her admission that she liked me a little bit, her "I'll see" when I asked her if we were to meet again, were recollections of a nature calculated to make me feel very fit to waltz the whole way from Clifton to my lodgings. When I bade my relatives good-night my uncle held me by the hand and said, "Jack, I don't want to discourage you, you know that ; but don't be too sanguine. You will find Alphonso Hawke a very large difficulty. However, be patient, be honest, be sincere up to the hilt, and above all, don't elope. Runaway marriages may answer very well for a time ; but let me tell you, in spite of the old playwrights, that a parent's blessing is an element of consecration that no marriage should be without ; and, though to be sure, old Hawke's benediction might not seem a sort of thing to sanctify circumstances very much, yet, weak as it may be in that way, you'll be better with it than without it."

I thanked him for his advice and told him in rather an imposing manner that I hoped it would not come to an elopement, though if Florence should be rendered unhappy, I certainly should not allow any domestic sentiment to stop

me—if she wished—from coming between her and her father; and then, accepting a cigar from him, I departed, not a little inflated by his suspicion that an elopement was possible. When I reached my lodgings and sat down to think over what had taken place that day, I was more than satisfied with the judgment that had determined me upon stopping in Bristol. Numerous delightful visions rose before me as I sat looking at the little room through the smoke of my uncle's excellent tobacco. I pictured Florence driven to distraction by her papa's severity and Mr. Morecombe's importunities, and calling upon me to rescue her from her state of misery. I even went so far as to figure that very elopement against which my uncle had advised me. Yes, I went through the whole agitating business. I prowled about the house, I hid letters under a stone beside her father's gate, where she would find them after dusk and eagerly devour them; I eventually won her consent to my bearing her away from her luxurious but cruel parental roof, and my undaunted imagination then proceeded to figure us in London lodgings, poor, but in the highest degree respectable, occasionally helped by my large-hearted uncle, and then, after a time, visited by old Hawke, who begged our forgiveness and handed his daughter a cheque that immediately enabled us to furnish a house in a fashionable square. What young lover, perplexed

by family objections, has not dreamt in some such fashion as this? We are all knight-errants in youth—our chivalry runs high—we disdain dross and think only of soul; our lances are couched, and we ride at full gallop. I had not sat in the rather uncomfortable armchair ten minutes before I had eloped, was married, was settled, was doing well, was returning my relation's hospitality by elegant entertainments, and had Mr. Hawke repeatedly calling, and talking of me in high terms behind my back. And when I went to bed all this happened again and again in dreams.

Yet, oddly enough, in spite of a night of para-disaical visions, the first thought that came into my head next morning when I awoke was my uncle's parting sentence: "Jack, I don't want to discourage you, you know that; but don't be too sanguine." I had risen rather later than usual, had breakfasted, had written a letter to my London landlady desiring her to forward me certain articles, and was lounging with a pipe in my mouth over a local paper. It was a little after eleven o'clock. The breakfast things were still upon the table, the cloth clean indeed, but the general appearance not particularly handsome, thanks to the remains of some fried bacon, a couple of eggshells, a stain under the coffee-pot where I had capsized a spoonful of the liquor.

All on a sudden a great gorgeous open carriage,

drawn by two horses with plenty of silver on their harness, and a couple of fellows in splendid livery on the box, drove up and stopped with a mighty rattle at the door of my lodgings. One glance was enough to assure me that it was the Hawkes' carriage, and that Mr. Hawke was inside it and alone. I jumped up and backed to the end of the room, whence I had a good view of the old man, who gazed sternly and contemptuously at the house, running his eyes up and down it. I determined not to see him. The idea of his coming fresh from the gilt and glory of Clifton Lodge to this bit of a room with its broken egg-shells and its cold relics of fried ham was awful to me. What story would he relate to Florence? How would he triumph over her in his relation of the figure the young gentleman who was in love with her cut when he was at home!

A fearful knock thundered through the house, and the neighbours over the way crowded to the windows to have a look. I went to the door of the room to intercept the landlady. As is usual on occasions when you are exceedingly impatient and don't want people to be kept waiting, a considerable interval elapsed before any attention was paid to the summons. The landlady then came out of the kitchen very deliberately—the kitchen was at the back of the house downstairs; had the woman seen the carriage or received into her ears the full thunder

of the knock, she would have bundled up smartly, no doubt—and I darted out upon her.

"Mrs. Chump," said I, "it is somebody for me. Please say I am not at home."

"Not at home!" cried she, looking at me with astonishment.

"I mean that I don't want to be in—say I'm out," said I, in an agony,

"But ye're not out," says she. "Would you have me tell a lie? Not for worlds, sir," and the creature dropped me a curtsey.

At that moment a second terrific summons—it was the footman, and I should have liked to knock his head off; the villain, I suppose, thought he could give himself airs upon a humble door—made Mrs. Chump hop like a wine-glass on a table heavily thumped. I saw so much severity of conscience in her face that I knew entreaty would be useless, and unless I ran her into the kitchen and threatened her with violence if she opened the door, there was nothing for it but to allow her to let old Hawke in. So I backed into the parlour, growling to her to make haste if she meant to answer the summons at all, and flung myself into a chair, catching hold of the newspaper and assuming as easy a posture as I could adopt.

"Is Mr. Seymour in?" the footman asked, after muttering something about folks' impudence in keeping people waiting.

"Yes, sir," replied Mrs. Chump, with hideous alacrity and a voice full of awe, having had no notion of the gorgeous apparition that stood opposite her house. The old fellow got out of the carriage, and I heard his boots creak. "Announce Mr. Hawke," said he; and Mrs. Chump, shoving into the room, said "Mr. Ork, sir." "Clear the table," said I. "Pray walk in, Mr. Hawke," and I stood up and pointed to a seat.

He looked an immense man in that little room. "Can I," said he, standing against the wall so as to be clear of Mrs. Chump, who was whipping the breakfast things off the table, "have a few minutes with you, sir?"

"Certainly," I replied. "Never mind the cloth, Mrs. Chump;" and I shut the door upon her as she backed out with her hands full of crockery. Mr. Hawke sat down and put his hat and gloves upon the table. He seemed to have grown half as big again since I saw him last. In breadth of face, surface of waistcoat, squareness of shoulders, and length and dimensions of legs and arms, there seemed a visible expansion. Now he was close to, I could remark that he was very nervous, and I judged that the scowls he had directed at the little house were merely the outward expressions of a mind labouring after courage. I was probably more nervous than he, though I was successful in putting on a manner that tolerably well cloaked my feelings.

"I have called upon you," said he, sitting bolt upright, "in reference to my daughter, Miss Hawke." I bowed and tried to look surprised; but it would not do. "I believe, sir," he continued, "that you are no—aw—no stranger to my wishes respecting that lady?"

"I have heard from my relatives that you want her to marry Mr. Morecombe, if that's what you mean, Mr. Hawke," I replied.

"Sir," he exclaimed, with a heavy nod, "that *is* what I mean. Your relatives are perfectly well acquainted with my wishes, and—aw—I greatly regret that a family whom I considered in the light of friends should have—aw—should have thought proper to—aw—to combine against me, to act in concert with, or rather, let me say, to court my daughter from the path of duty and—aw—back her—yes, I will say and *back* her—in defying my wishes."

"This," said I, "concerns my uncle. He is so well qualified to take his own part that there is no reason for me to do more than refer you to him."

"I consider him and his family more guilty than you, sir," he exclaimed, warming up and talking with some briskness. "They knew my wishes; Mr. and Mrs. Seymour are—aw—are parents themselves. They had no right, I say, they had no *right* to allow you and my daughter to meet, to—to—in short—aw—it was their duty as parents and

neighbours to discountenance what they knew would prove objectionable to me."

"All this, Mr. Hawke," said I, "as I have already said, refers to my relations, and on that subject my uncle is the proper person for you to address yourself to. You have, I presume," said I with a glance round the room as much as to tell him not to judge me by what he saw, "called upon me on some matter relating to myself. May I inquire what it is?"

"It concerns your admiration of my daughter," he answered. "I have every reason to believe that you have gone so far as to—aw—to express even affection for her, and the purpose of this visit is to beg you to discontinue your attentions to her." I looked at him steadily, for my wits seemed to come to me when he said this. "I have no doubt," he continued, "that your regard for her is perfectly sincere, and that you are actuated by the—aw—the most gentleman-like and honourable intentions. But that is not the point. Whatever construction your intentions may bear, they—aw—they must prove equally objectionable to me; and I am here, Mr. Seymour, for the purpose of calling upon you as a gentleman not only to cease to have any thoughts about Miss Hawke, but to prove your principles as a man of honour by removing from Bristol."

I looked at him with astonishment. "Remove

from Bristol!" I ejaculated. "Cease to have any thoughts about Miss Hawke!" and, as I hope to be forgiven, I burst into a loud laugh.

His face turned as red as a powder flag. "If," he exclaimed angrily, "I have no power to oblige you to leave Bristol, you may rest assured that I can and will stop your unwarranted attentions to my daughter. I tell you this," says he, breathing hard and laying hold of his beard with one hand and in a manner menacing me with the other, "so that if you have hired this lodging with the hope of obtaining the end, which I have no doubt your uncle has put into your head, you may as well spare yourself disappointment by—aw—by leaving the town without delay."

"I can assure you, Mr. Hawke," said I, "that I would far rather you should talk to me rudely than politely, because by so doing you enable me to tell you more than I should think of saying were you kind or even courteous. A couple of sentences will convey my intentions. First, I mean to stop in Bristol as long as I choose; and second, I am in love with your daughter, and have not the least idea of relinquishing the hope of one day winning her. I am sorry," I continued, "that your unkindness should force me to speak so frankly. I'm not going to tell you I respect your wishes about your daughter. You have no right to force her hand. The Commandment says she must honour you; but

you ought to honour her too, sir. Still, I am sorry to run foul of your notions, though if you suppose I could help falling in love with your daughter, all that I can say is, Mr. Hawke, you pay your own child a very poor compliment. And since I'm talking," said I, amazed by my own bluntness and assurance, and yet not in the least degree able to control myself, "I should like to point out that I am no fortune-hunter. I am quite capable of supporting a wife. Had I found Miss Hawke living even in such lodgings as these, dressed like one of your housemaids, and having to sew for bread, I should love her not less than I do now, though I could not love her more."

This put the old fellow quite at a loss. He had been red, but now he was white. I suppose he saw that I was not to be managed by his anger, nor to be made ashamed of myself, and he would not like to drop his sour dignity and high parental wrath for an appealing attitude. He seized his hat and gloves and stood up, and so did I.

"I had hoped," said he, "to have gained your promise as a gentleman to cease annoying me through Miss Hawke. But," added he brutally, "I see what you are. And let me advise you," continued he, shaking his gloves at me, "not to come near my house, not to have any communication with my daughter, to—aw—to keep your distance, though you should stop here for the rest of your

life. I'll have you watched, sir—I'll set the police at you—I'll protect myself—I'll, I'll—why, confound your impudence ! who the devil are *you*, to have designs upon my daughter?" he cried, casting aside his "aws" and breeding and whipping out with a genuine piece of squatterism.

Nothing but my temper stopped me from laughing at this exquisitely absurd contrast. It was not pleasant, however, to be sworn at and scorned, and I was in the act of delivering a hot answer when I was stopped by a rapping on the window. I looked and saw my uncle trying to peer in through the muslin curtain and tapping with the head of his stick. I immediately went to the door and opened it, and he came in.

"Who have you here?" he asked, kicking his heels on the door-mat. "Has Florence driven over to marry ye?"

There was no use in crying "Hush!" to this; the sitting-room door was open, and what was worse, Mr. Hawke came into the passage as the question was asked in a loud voice.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Hawke?" exclaimed my uncle coldly. "Jack, by your leave I'll sit down. Egad, this heat is very trying to an old man. Mr. Hawke, don't let me drive you away, sir. Are you here on business? if so I'll sit in your carriage till you've done—but sit I must."

Mr. Hawke bowed stiffly, and was waiting for us

to come out of the narrow passage in order to leave the house, when I said, "I hope you'll not hurry, sir. Uncle, Mr. Hawke *is* here on business that concerns us both. He has forced me to speak very plainly—I am very sorry he should have given me occasion to do so; but now that you have unexpectedly called, and there are no ladies of the family present, we cannot do better than talk this matter out and have the satisfaction, at all events, of knowing one another's meaning."

"That satisfaction we have already got," exclaimed Mr. Hawke angrily. "You have been plain enough and you know *my* meaning, sir."

My uncle entered the parlour and sat down. Hawke went to the table and stood against it, and I remained in the doorway.

"What is the matter, Mr. Hawke? What has my nephew Jack been doing?" said my uncle, putting on a face of concern but evidently not disliking the situation.

"Mr. Seymour," said the old gentleman, very pale, but speaking with pluck, "you are no stranger to my wishes respecting my own child. I find that your nephew has been paying her attention, and I charge him with obstructing a desire that lies close to my heart. I have called for the purpose of requesting him to cease having any further relations with Miss Hawke, and to remove himself from Bristol, where his presence is objec-

tionable to me; and I think, sir, considering—aw—considering that I owe this disagreeable state of things to your introduction of your nephew to us and to the interest your family have—aw—taken in advancing him in my daughter's good graces, manifestly against my desires, I have a right to expect you to support me in the demands I have made upon your nephew's honour as a gentleman."

"You are fluent upon my honour as a gentleman, Mr. Hawke," said I, "but you do not treat me as a gentleman."

"Look here, Mr. Hawke," said my uncle; "I can't control human nature. Jack is my brother Tom's son: he is a gentleman, and I introduced him to you as a gentleman. I am responsible to you for his good manners. Had he behaved rudely at your house, had he shown himself ill-bred, I should have submitted to your reproaches like a lamb. But I have no influence over his heart. If he is in love with Florence it is her fault, not mine—her fault for being a very pretty woman, do you see? Sir, you are an older man than I: let us exert our common sense in this matter."

"It is really—aw—not a question of our joint common sense, but for mine alone," exclaimed Mr. Hawke hotly. "My daughter is *my* business; I do not desire that your nephew shall—aw—shall have any further relations with her, and since he

has as good as defied me and insulted me by the most ill-placed—aw—the most ill-placed mirth, I have given him notice," says he, turning upon me with a scowl and then addressing himself to my uncle, "that I shall spare no trouble to protect my daughter against his disagreeable advances."

"You are not very polite, Mr. Hawke," said my uncle, eyeing him somewhat grimly. "I should have hoped that your respect for the genteel and the exclusive would have taught you some reserve in the use of words. As to Jack's advances—they're not made to *you*, and consequently you have no right to call them disagreeable."

"My respect for the genteel and the exclusive, as you are pleased to call it," answered Mr. Hawke, standing erect as a footguard in a sentry-box, "is sufficiently great to make me desire that your nephew will have nothing whatever to do with me or mine."

"No desire of yours would weigh with me," said I, going into the room so that I could look at him. "I am in love with your daughter, not with you; and if I marry her it will be to get a wife, not a father-in-law."

"You are a very impudent young man," he exclaimed, staring at me as if he had a mind to fall upon me.

"But why d'ye insult him, then, Mr. Hawke?" cried my uncle. "If you object to him because

he is poor or because he's been a sailor, or because he hasn't a title, say so ; but don't speak to him as if he was a *parvenu*, some ragman's son 'of yesterday. Hang it, man ! I wouldn't address even young Morecombe in such words as you have applied to my nephew."

"I am fully prepared to be insulted by you, sir," cried Mr. Hawke ; "and if I linger another moment in this—aw—this *den* it will be only to tell you that I consider the manner in which you have encouraged your nephew in his encroachments upon my—aw—my domestic circle, and the sympathy your daughters have given Florence in her defiant behaviour to her father, unworthy of you, sir, as a gentleman and a neighbour." And so saying he wheeled round and marched out of the room.

My uncle half rose as if to run after him ; but I put my hand upon his arm and stopped him. "For Heaven's sake, let him go !" I exclaimed. "He believes he is wronged—he is an older man than you—and consider for a moment how utterly ridiculous must be any ideas Mr. Hawke may have about what constitutes a gentleman !" As I said this the house-door was violently slammed, and old Hawke, with his nose high in the air and quivering with indignation, got into his carriage and drove off. My uncle for a few minutes was in a great passion.

"What did he say ?—that I wasn't a gentleman !

how can I punish him for that?" he cried. "In my young days I'd have shot him for such a sentence. Not a gentleman! Why did you stop me from forcing him to apologize? He never should have left this house without apologizing to me. Not a gentleman!" However, he cooled down after a little, and when I reminded him that he insulted the old fellow first by sneering at Morecombe, he burst into a laugh.

"But what a rude old chap he is!" cried he. "What had he said before I arrived?" I told him. "And does he think he can *order* you out of Bristol?" he exclaimed. "I suppose all this comes from Emily telling him of your walk with Florence yesterday, which, coming on top of the girl's refusal of Morecombe, would drive the old man mad. It's odd enough that I should arrive when he was here. I had some business at my banker's, and being within five minutes of you I thought I'd step in and rest myself. I recognized old Hawke's carriage, and honestly supposed Florence had called, for could I dream that Hawke would come in state to visit you merely to have a row?"

"I'm sorry it's happened," said I, lighting my pipe with a gloomy face. "It has made enemies of the two families, the very thing I left your house to avert, and I am afraid he'll now take such steps to stop all chance of my meeting or com-

municating with his daughter as will play old Harry with my hopes."

"Never you mind about his enmity so far as *we* are concerned," replied my uncle; "and as to your chances, are you worse off than you were before? He may hate you now: he disliked you then—what's the difference? Let me tell you, my lad, that his calling here is a thunderingly wholesome sign for *you*, since it means that he's seen enough in his daughter to calculate that you'll make *his* chances of blood small enough if he doesn't get you to sheer off somehow."

"Yes," said I, "I appreciate all that. But don't you see that he may go and tell Florence that I've grossly insulted him, and work upon her feelings as a child."

"Tut, tut! Work upon her feelings as a sweetheart, you mean. What's the name of the French play in which either a lover or a father must forfeit his life at the choice of a girl who decides by sending her papa to the hangman and marrying her young man? The chap who wrote that knew human nature. Make your mind easy. Love betwixt youngsters always flourishes best where there are family riots, just as you get the finest fruits in the land where earthquakes are common. Did you ever read 'Romeo and Juliet'? I shan't speak to your aunt or cousins about this. No need for them to hear of this shindy. But I say, why

d'ye want to go on living here *now*? You left because you thought your presence at my house would stop intercourse between the Hawkes and us. You may take it," said he with a laugh, "that that intercourse is now wholly suspended, though not between Florence and the girls, I hope. Come home with me, man, and make yourself happy."

I thanked him heartily, but declined, saying that as things went there was no telling how long I might require to remain in Bristol; and that I was sure, let him do what he might to make me happy at his house, to feel myself an intruder upon his hospitality after awhile. I also pointed out that my going to live close to Clifton Lodge might cause Mr. Hawke to carry his daughter off to some distant place which I might never get to hear of.

"I can't imagine that," said he, "if the distant place has a post office and Florence means business. But I don't want to influence you. There's no doubt you're in earnest, and as you seem pretty capable of playing your own cards, I don't want to take upon myself the responsibility of directing the game in any way. All luck attend ye! He called me no gentleman, did he? and talked about you as if you were a bargee? All luck attend ye, I say!"

CHAPTER XIII.

LOGGINGS.

I TOLD you when I set out that this yarn would be more of a log-book than a regular tale, and though I have kept my facts pretty close down to this point, I have now reached a part where the form of narrative I have chosen will very well serve my turn for a spell. When nothing particular happens, you see, there is no good relating it. Besides, what should all these dialogues, quarrels, descriptions which I have set down signify but steps in the gangway ladder over the side to enable you to step aboard the ship we are going to sail away in before long ? If I had asked you to embark at Gravesend at the opening of the tale, I should have had to keep the anchor down and all hands waiting whilst I told you what brought me aboard, and gave you the history of some of the people walking on the poop and explained who I was. No, I've done the right thing, I reckon, in going back and bringing you along with me to the sea (which should be

heaving in sight very soon), and in yarning to you as we journey about the causes which drove me on to blue water once more. So now then for an extract or two from my log-book of that date.

The quarrel with old Hawke capsized my spirits badly. It was all very fine for my uncle to pooh-pooh, and say it made no difference. Not to him, I dare say, but to me it was a most distressing circumstance. The old fellow of course had driven away execrating me. I had defied him, in a manner mocked at him. That was not all. He had found me in mean lodgings, the room full of tobacco smoke, the table ornamented with broken eggshells and such things, and of course the notion of my poverty begotten in him by what he saw, would go further than the worst insults I could heave at his head to force him into extreme measures to end my pursuit of his daughter. I suppose he had obliged Florence to divulge my address, which she had obtained from Sophie. Emily, of course, was at the bottom of it all; and as my uncle had said, my walk with Florence combined with her refusal of Morecombe was more than Alphonso could bear. How did I know that his daughter had not given him reason to believe that she was in love with me? Between ourselves, this was my conviction, and it was like luff-tackles and preventer backstays to me during this rolling and pitching and heaving and wallopping time.

Yet bitterly did I regret that the old fellow had called and found me in. He had manifestly come in hot haste and in a passion ; his manner of talking proved that there was no policy, no fore-thought ; he had commanded me to leave Bristol, and threatened me, by heavens ! with the police if I had anything more to do with his daughter. Nothing but unreasoning temper could account for such a nonsensical visit as he had paid me ; and now he would go home smarting from the shot poured into him by the small-arms man, my uncle, and loathing me for the meanness of my habitation and for my youthful scorn and defiance of him.

Says you, “ And pray what had you to fear from his loathing and all that, seeing that he was bitterly opposed to you before ever he had set foot in your lodgings ? ” Ay, but can’t you see, mates, that this quarrel would strengthen his case with his daughter ; it would enable him to represent himself to her as an outraged man, to depict me in the basest and most odious colours to her, and to appeal to her feelings as a child ? This I say was my fear, and so acute was it that when my uncle went away I determined to write Florence a full account of all that had passed, implore her not to allow her father to prejudice her against me, and then, by hook or by crook, to get the letter put into her hands, though the job should cost me fifty pounds.

The breakfast cloth was upon the table, and I rang for Mrs. Chump to remove it. "Pray, ma'am," says I, with my temper bubbling like pea-soup in a ship's coppers, "why did you subject me to the disturbance—which of course you over-heard—by refusing to tell the gentleman I was out?"

"Begging your parding, Mr. Seymour, sir, you wasn't out," she replied, stripping the table in an agitated and distracted manner. "I couldn't go to tell a lie against my own salvagion to oblige no one."

"But don't you know," cried I, "that a statement of that kind is a mere form and *not* a lie, well understood by people, and meant to save the rudeness of the truth?"

"My salvagion is first," answered Mrs. Chump, "and my consideration is *that*, when I speaks no matter on what."

"If that's your notion," said I, "you'll find it a hard job to be saved, ma'am; for should you live to become an old woman, and I hope you may, I'm sure, you'll go to your grave so loaded with sea-blessings that there is every prospect of your foundering under them; and our hopes are that way," said I, pointing to the ceiling, "and not yonder," pointing to the floor. I then waved her out of the room with a proper sweep of the hand towards the door, and after pacing about for twenty

minutes or so, rehearsing what I should say, I sat down to write a letter to Florence Hawke.

I recall picturing her whilst I hung over the note-paper, pen in hand, as being in a most disconsolate state of mind, her eyes red with tears, her looks most forlorn, her father treating her tyrannously, passionately using all sorts of threats, Emily cold and contemptuous and speaking of me only to say something vicious. All this of course was purely imaginary; I mean that I could not know that she was fretting or that her papa was behaving brutally; but every young fellow when he writes to his sweetheart has her before his mind's eye, and addresses her as if she were opposite him; and that was what I did, figuring Florence in the melancholy Mariana, moated-grange-like posture I have described. It was this that inspired my pen and caused me to decant myself. I have no clear recollection of what I wrote, but believe I told her about her father's visit and implored her not to allow any version he should give her of it to prejudice her against me, and asked her never to forget that I loved her to distraction, and would die for her if by cutting my throat or hanging myself I could make her happy. All this I may have written, with a deal of other impassioned stuff, winding up with a hint that if she was miserable she had nothing to do but to hoist a distress signal. It was

an impudent stroke. It really meant, "If your father's treatment makes you wretched here, I am ready to run away with you at a moment's notice." I wanted her to understand that, to feel that I was a refuge, and so I cocked it in ; but I say it was a very audacious, impudent thing for me to imply.

Well, this letter being written, the next job was to get it delivered to her. How was I to do that ? I roamed about the little room like a prisoner in his cell, turning over all sorts of notions. The queerest ideas came into my head. What did I think of taking a policeman into my confidence, describing the lady and offering him a sovereign to watch for old Hawke to leave the house, then knock, ask to see Miss Hawke, give her the letter and tell her to say he had called to know if any boys had been getting over Mr. Hawke's walls ? What did I think of bribing the family butcher's man to smuggle the letter into Florence's hand under the pretence that it was a list of revised prices for prime joints, and that his master had asked him to see Miss Hawke and nobody else ? What did I think of buying a cap or a hat and pinning the letter inside it as if it were the [bill, and despatching it in a bag or box to Clifton Lodge ? These are samples of the schemes which were hove up out of me by the throes of my imagination. But none of them satisfied me, and I was thrown back upon Sophie. I knew her family would object,

that I should be acting dishonestly in asking her to convey the letter, and that she would be acting undutifully in accepting the errand. But you see, lads, it was bound to go somehow or other, and there was no one to manage its transmission with greater skill and secrecy than Sophie. So I went to work and wrote to her, and I better remember this letter than the other. I told her I was rendered desperate by the necessity of communicating with Florence, that I had no friend in the world but dearest Sophie, that I blushed to ask her to do anything in opposition to her parents' wishes, and that I called Heaven to witness if she would oblige me by handing the inclosed letter to Miss Hawke, I would never again ask her to disobey her mamma. This done, I rang the bell and asked Mrs. Chump if there was an intelligent man or boy knocking about anywhere, who for a couple of shillings would immediately deliver the letters (which were under one cover) at my uncle's house. The words which had passed between us made her anxious to oblige; besides, I paid her fifteen shillings a week, and was not to be sneered at. Yes, Mrs. Galloway's boy would be glad to run if he was at home; she'd go and seek him. He was at home, and came back with Mrs. Chump; I gave him the address and he instantly sped away, loudly whistling; and I sat down trembling after my great intellectual exertions.

I passed the rest of the day in a very moping, skulking fashion. I ordered Mrs. Chump to cook me a chop by way of dinner, and found even the lean thing she dished up more than my love-sick appetite could consume. I wandered about the Corporation quays, looked into the shop windows, and so forth, but was never long away from my lodgings. What tortures of mind I underwent on account of that letter! Would Sophie send it? What would Florence think if she received it? Would she answer it? Would she show it to her papa? Every youth must endure experiences of this kind, I suppose, when he is in love; but I declare that I would rather have half-a-foot of my stature knocked off, or spend ten years of my life in an Atlantic cattle-ship, than go again through the sufferings of that time.

At half-past eight that evening I was in my sitting-room holding a novel in my hand, upside down very likely, when a single knock was struck upon the house door, and Mrs. Chump looked in and said, "Mr. Seymour's servant, sir, for you." I went out and saw Cobb, who flourished his thumb upon his forehead and said, "Miss Sophie's love, sir, and she sends you this." It was a letter; I carried it to the candles, and found two inclosures, one from Sophie and the other (sealed in a very little envelope) from Florence. When I saw this latter's handwriting, the bold "Jack

Seymour, Esq.,” with F. H. up in the corner and the familiar goose for a seal, my agitation was so great that the letters quivered in my hand like a flat candlestick in the grasp of a nervous man awakened by unusual sounds in the dead of night. I read it through, and then I read Sophie’s, and then I turned to the other, and might have gone on reading them over and over again alternately for an hour or two had I not been interrupted by a modest cough in the passage. I peered and found Cobb erect on the door-mat.

“Why, Cobb,” said I, “I quite forgot that you were waiting.”

“Is there any answer, sir?” he inquired.

“No,” said I, and I put two half-crowns into his hand. He was humbly thankful, and then went away. Sophie’s letter ran thus:—

“MY DEAR JACK,

“I was actually talking to Florence at our gate when the boy arrived with your note. She had been visiting some poor person and I had been to the library for a novel, and we met opposite our house. I asked the boy what he wanted, and he said he had brought a letter from a gentleman. I looked at it and saw it was addressed to me, which made me rather nervous, for, upon my honour, Jack, I did not know your handwriting. Well, inside I found your letter to

Florence, and I said, ‘Now this is too bad ! here is my cousin wanting me to be his postman against mamma’s wishes. However, Florence,’ said I, ‘as you are *here*, there can be no harm in handing you this,’ and I gave her the letter. She read hers whilst I read mine. I asked her what you had written. She put the letter in her pocket and answered, ‘Oh, papa has called upon him, and I am afraid there has been a quarrel. I shall hear all about it when I get home.’ But there was *more* in your letter than that, I am sure, for there was the prettiest colour in her cheeks, and she could not help smiling—not *disdainfully*—oh, dear no, sir ! *quite* the contrary, I assure you. Then she asked me what my letter contained. I told her to read it, as *I* had no secrets ; and then I said, ‘Shall you answer yours ?’ ‘I don’t know,’ said she ; ‘he ought not to write to me.’ ‘Don’t leave the poor fellow in suspense, Florence,’ said I. ‘See how he has written to me ; he is clearly dying of love. I don’t know what he has said to you, and I don’t ask ; but if it deserves an answer you ought to write, dear.’ ‘I couldn’t send him a letter by post,’ said she. ‘If I write a short note will you forward it to him ?’ After begging her to write, I felt it would be mean to refuse her ; so I said ‘Yes,’ intending to tell mamma when the letter arrived and ask leave to send it you. Well, it came half an hour ago, and mamma said,

' You cannot help it, for Florence was with you when Mr. Jack's letter was brought, but it must not happen again.' So here you have your sweet-heart's letter, and since she appears willing to correspond, the best thing you can do is to get me to ask her how you may write to her in future without trying to make me break the fifth commandment.

" Yours affectionately,

" SOPHIE.

" P.S.—When are you coming to see us and tell me all about your quarrel with Mr. Hawke ? What did he say—was he *rude* ? "

Florence's letter was shorter and sweeter.

" DEAR MR. SEYMOUR,

" Sophie has given me your letter. I am grieved that papa should have called upon you ; so many things are done in this world which are quite unnecessary. You need not fear that I shall be prejudiced by anything that can be said. I hope I am able to form my own opinions on people and judge for myself. But I must ask you not to write to me again. I have already incurred my father's serious displeasure, and am anxious to do nothing to offend him. Hardly anything has pained me more in all this trouble than being separated from your cousins, whose

society I loved. However, I shall never allow anything to estrange them and me. Whenever I am alone and pass your uncle's house and see Sophie or Amelia I stop and speak, and perhaps on one of these occasions we may chance to meet.

"Yours truly,

"FLORENCE HAWKE."

How this letter may strike you I cannot guess ; me it sent slap into heaven. No wonder I gave Cobb two half-crowns ; fifty times that money would I have cheerfully paid to the bearer of that ecstatic document. Sly did Sophie call her ? Oh, shipmate, is the beautiful plant sly for blossoming ? I admit that there was a trifling contradiction between the passage in which she said she was anxious to do nothing to offend her father and the sentence in which she showed me how I might sometimes meet her. But consider the influences which were acting upon her. If you start the port wheel of a paddle-boat hard ahead and reverse the starboard wheel hard astern, there's no helm that I know of which will make the vessel hold a steady course. But, Lord love you ! I am not spinning this yarn as an apology for the darling of my heart. Love is a current that has caused many a stronger nature than my lassie's to drag and cut and run. And see here, boys ; if a parent don't want his child's anchor to " come home "—

and you know what that means—let him take care to furnish her with good holding-ground in his own character and conduct. And so Amen to that as a piece of briny advice, dedicated to the memory of Alphonso Hawke, and be hanged to him !

* * * * *

And now for a second logging, and much will it surprise you, I don't doubt. It is something as unexpected in its day as the entry of the Yankee-mate, who, being drunk, fell overboard, and when he was fished up and put into dry clothes, staggered to his journal and wrote, "This day the ship went down, and all hands was drowned but me."

The entry is this : "I did not see Florence Hawke again on dry land."

Through no fault of mine, you may heartily believe. Day after day for a fortnight together I would walk to my uncle's house, and when there hang about the front grounds in the hope that Florence would pass. I was honest enough to explain to my uncle why I haunted his premises. "Come I must," said I, "unless you order me out ; and, even then, the Queen's highway being as much mine as yours, I shall buy a camp stool and sit at your gate, for I want to see Florence Hawke, and she told me I was likely to see her here, and I don't know what has become of her. She has not written to Sophie ; my cousins say they are for-

bidden to write to her, and amongst you all there is no means of getting any satisfaction."

"Jack," replied my uncle, "you may sit outside or inside my gate and welcome; you may perch yourself on one of the spikes atop of it, if you please; and you are still more welcome to make my house your home and to keep watch for your beauty from your old bedroom window, where, if you'll but say the word, I'll have a telescope mounted for you strong enough to show the dairy-maids making green cheese in the moon. But though I don't want to discourage you, as you know, there seems something so fantastic in the game you're playing, that upon my word, if I were you, I'd chuck up the sponge and retire before all this hoping and moping and mooning has made your heart too battered a thing to offer to the next peerless creature ye may happen to light on. What's the good of going on tacking and ratching when wind and tide are against you, and when every board you make finds you further to leeward? Better bring up, man, coil down, and turn in."

To all which of course I listened with irritable disdain, thanking him for his advice, and assuring him that I would rather miserably perish by the hands of the hangman than abandon the only hopes which now kept me alive.

However, before the fortnight was quite expired, Sophie, who was my good angel, managed to get

some news for me. She had met a Miss Lloyd, who was a friend of the Hawkes, at the house of a Colonel Coldsteel (the people of Bristol and Clifton will of course understand that all the names in this book are false), and she learnt from this young lady that Florence had been confined to the house by a violent cold that had threatened her with an attack of pleurisy ; also that Mr. Morecombe had left Clifton Lodge, his ankle being sound again ; and further, that Miss Damaris Hawke had arrived from Australia on the preceding evening. When Sophie told me this I immediately exclaimed, “ Is it a severe cold, do you think, or is it her papa’s cruelty ? How are we to know that he is not slowly breaking her heart by his severity ? ”

“ Well,” replied Sophie, “ some suspicion of that kind came into my head, and I asked Miss Lloyd several questions. She said that she had not seen Florence for a week, and that when they met she could not help thinking there was something on her mind, for her spirits did not seem good. But there can be no doubt that she is confined to her house by a cold, for Mr. Hawke’s doctor attends the Lloyds, and Miss Lloyd heard about Florence from him.”

“ But why don’t you write ; why don’t you call ; why don’t you do something, Sophie ? ” I cried. “ What is Mr. Hawke to you ? Florence is your

friend ; if you can talk to her out of doors, what should prevent you from sending her a note or a servant to know how she is ? ”

“ I would do so gladly,” she answered, speaking with unaffected concern ; “ but bit by bit the story of Mr. Hawke’s quarrel with papa in your lodgings has leaked out, and mamma will not hear of our having anything further to say to the Hawkes, unless we meet Florence accidentally, when of course we may speak, she says. I am truly sorry for her sake and for yours, Jack ; but we *must* study our dignity.”

I had nothing to say. My aunt’s views were quite proper ; but it was a bitter hard time for me, mates. I had bargained on meeting Florence again and again, and the disappointment and the not knowing what to do and what was to happen made it, I say, an awful time for me. Would she not think that if I were as devoted as I had sworn I was, that I would move heaven and earth to learn how she was, and to let her know that I was at hand, loving her to distraction, and willing to cut off my head to please her ? But there was no mode of communicating with her, no means of learning how she did except from the chance gossip of her friends. Memory, however, is a nourishment on which the little god Cupid will sometimes contrive to keep himself fat, if not comfortable ; and, for my part, I had a fair stock of that diet

to live on. I almost forgot how long I had then been in Bristol, but certainly not very many weeks had passed since I had met Florence for the first time ; and during those few weeks there had been enough passages between her and me to enable me to take many a good plunge into memory and emerge always ardent and always resolved from the delightful bath.

I well remember that when I heard that Florence's Aunt Damaris had arrived, and when I had considered a little over that piece of news, I felt somewhat uneasy, conjecturing, of course, that Hawke's sister would side with him in his wishes about Florence, and that my darling might have to contend with another oppressive influence in this Australian spinster. But on the whole I do not know that thoughts of Aunt Damaris troubled me much. Of Florence's relations I can only recollect thinking of one with constant anxiety, and that was old Hawke. He had not, it is true, the power of preventing his daughter from running away with me if she had a mind to marry me in that fashion ; but whilst she remained too loyal to her home to forsake it without her father's consent, she and I were at the old chap's mercy, for he had really nothing to do to effectually separate us but to carry her abroad and go on journeying about with her until he should reckon he had travelled me out of his sphere altogether.

I may tell you that the fear that he would act in this way haunted me incessantly, and made me a good deal more cautious than my temper would otherwise have suffered me to behave. I know very well that I would again and again have defiantly rung the bell of Clifton Lodge and asked after Florence; I would have hung about the house; I would have spared no extraordinary pains and expense to communicate by letter with the darling of my heart had I been sufficiently well-to-do to have followed in the wake of old Hawke all over the world—that is, if I ended in driving him out of Clifton. But it was very certain that if Alphonso carried his daughter away from England, I should be ‘sewed up,’ as Jack says, for want of funds to stick to his skirts. What sort of a pursuit of them through Europe should I have been able to make on something less than five pounds a week? Many a long talk would I have on this subject with Sophie and Amelia, who always tried to persuade me that Mr. Hawke was not a man to leave his home and wander about the Continent with his daughter merely to shake off a young fellow whose attentions were objectionable; but I was not so sure. I would say, “Yes, but if Mr. Hawke has set his heart on splicing Florence to Morecombe, and if Florence is unmistakably showing by her manner that she has a liking for me, and growing low-spirited and so forth, then in

my opinion he is just the sort of man to take strong measures to end (as he might hope) a business that is putting a stop to his queer ambition. Other fathers have done stranger and more troublesome things than taking their daughters away for a year or two in order to warp the girls clear of the men who are not wanted."

"Ay, but Jack," I remember Amelia answering, "do you think that Mr. Hawke attaches all the significance you think he does to your admiration for Florence?"

"Yes, I do," said I. "I told him I wanted to marry his daughter, and I suppose he knows what that means."

"And do you suppose, Amelia," said Sophie, always at my side fighting for me, "that Florence has not given her papa to understand that she is fond of Jack? If he thought that Jack's admiration did not signify, why should he have called at his lodgings and requested him to discontinue admiring Florence and leave Bristol?"

Amelia had no reply to make to this; but she still declared that in her opinion Mr. Hawke was not so frightened of me as to go abroad with his daughter and leave his home for the length of time that would be needful to make such a measure as that of use.

"I earnestly hope he is not," said I; "but we shall see."

Well, the days rolled on, and never once did I set eyes on Florence nor hear of her. Utterly disheartened, I abandoned the punctual visit I had made to my uncle's house in the hope of finding her talking to my cousins. Nor did I ever encounter her in the streets, though several times I met the Hawkes' carriage, sometimes occupied by Hawke and Emily, sometimes by Emily and a friend, and on the last occasion by an elderly lady with a sharp face and a wide brown hat, whom I privately suspected to be Aunt Damaris, though she was rattled past too quickly to enable me to tell more than her countenance was of a severe and hatchet-like aspect. Over and over again would I ask Sophie or Amelia, and very often my uncle, if there was any news of Florence. They would be one day able to inform me that she was still in Clifton, another day that somebody had said she was better, later on that somebody had said she was quite well, that Miss Jones had met her with her aunt at a circulating library, that Dr. Thompson was at a dinner party at Clifton Lodge and said that Florence was present and looked lovely, and so on; and once my aunt was sure that Florence was with her father in their carriage, but she would not look, as she did not want to catch Mr. Hawke's eye or appear to see him.

Of course whatever there was of mystery in Florence's withdrawal from us was wholly due to

my impatience ; for I would forget to consider that a week in those days seemed as long as a year, and that for some time she had been indisposed and confined to the house. But I who was half crazy to see her, immoderately jealous to behold her sweet face that I might interpret from it some sign of thought, some hint of expression favourable to my passionate wishes, found a week passed without seeing her as long, as I have said, as a year, and naturally fell into many harassing and distracting conceits respecting her.

"It is all very well," I said to Sophie, "for Miss Jones and Mr. Robinson and Dr. Thompson and the rest of them to tell you that she drives and walks and dines and is cured of her cold ; but how the deuce is it *I* never see her ? How is it *you* don't meet her ? Does she take another road when she calls upon her poor families ? Why did she write that she hoped we should meet when she passed your house and caught sight of you, if she meant nothing by it ?"

Whereupon Sophie with much good sense explained that in all probability Florence had not felt well enough to call upon her poor families, and consequently had had no occasion to pass along the road in which my uncle's house stood ; also that, for anything we could tell, her papa had prohibited her from walking alone, "in which case, Jack," said she, "it would be better *not* to meet ; for if

she should be with Emily or Mr. Hawke we should have to pass her, which would be very painful and embarrassing to her and us ; and if she were with her aunt we might really risk being insulted by stopping to shake hands, for depend upon it Mr. Hawke has poisoned his sister's mind against us all, so that there is no telling how Aunt Damaris might behave were we to meet."

However, about ten days or a fortnight after the arrival of Aunt Damaris—it is convenient to make the movements of that old lady a scoring-peg in these recollections—I had been dining with my uncle, and was lingering with the others over the dessert, when Cobb, the man-servant, entered with a letter, which he gave to Sophie. She immediately exclaimed: "It is from Florence!" and read it. You may conceive that I watched her fat face attentively.

"Well," cried my uncle, "what does Jack's Delight say? Any loving messages? Does she send me a kiss?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Charles!" exclaimed my aunt.

"She is going to Scotland," said Sophie.

"What!" I shouted; and I let drop the dessert knife and fork I was plying, and fell back in my chair.

"Don't faint, Jack!" bawled my uncle.
"Amelia, give your cousin a glass of brandy."

"What is she going to do in Scotland, Sophie?" I asked in a weak voice.

"Read the letter aloud, Sophie," said my uncle. "Sing it out, my love. We're all related here, and there are no secrets. Now then."

Whereupon Sophie read as follows:—

"DEAREST SOPHIE,

"I am so very sorry to have been able to see nothing of you of late. No doubt you know that I was confined to the house for a week with a violent cold, which at one time the doctor was afraid might lead to an attack of pleurisy, as I suffered a great deal from pain in the side. However, I am now quite well. Aunt Damaris is with us, and she has taken me under her wing. Papa is very glad to have her. Her visit will last about a month or six weeks, and she has made the voyage merely for her health and for the sake of seeing us. I am writing chiefly to let you know that Aunt Damaris, papa, Emily, and I are going to Scotland to-morrow, though how long we shall be away I do not know, nor can I tell you yet the place we shall stay at, as nothing will be arranged until we have arrived in Edinburgh. At all events, you will know in what part of the world I am. Papa says the excursion is necessary for my health, and it is to be made for me alone. But indeed I am quite well, and do not feel to need any

change, and am very sorry to leave Clifton, even for a short time. If I can manage to write to you from Scotland, I will. Meanwhile accept my dear love, and remember me most affectionately to your papa and mamma and Amelia.

“Yours sincerely,

“FLORENCE HAWKE.

“Do not forget to remember me to your cousin Jack. Is he still at Bristol, and will he remain there *now*, do you suppose ?”

“That’s all,” said Sophie; and she put the letter into the envelope and passed it to me.

“A woman’s meaning is always reserved for her postscripts,” observed my uncle. “Florence’s love to you, Sophie, and her affectionate remembrance to us will not do. Her letter is meant for Jack, and for nobody else.”

“And that is why I have given it to Jack,” says Sophie.

“There can be no doubt,” said my aunt, “judging from her allusion to Miss Damaris Hawke, that that lady is acting as Florence’s duenna.”

“I am sure of it!” exclaimed Amelia. “My belief is that Mr. Hawke has refused to allow her to walk alone. You will find that her aunt has always accompanied her since she has been well enough to leave the house.”

"How neatly the girl puts it," said my uncle.
"Aunt Damaris has taken me under her wing." The sentence tells an immense story—long arguments, a few shindies, a mass of abuse of us, scorn and hate of Jack yonder, and, as a result, Aunt Damaris with that boy's sweetheart under her lean arm! But cheer up, Jack—Aunt Damaris' visit is only to last six weeks."

I had been reading Florence's letter, and now put it in my pocket as my uncle addressed me. I was foolishly depressed, and felt myself haggard and long-faced. "I told you, Sophie," said I, "that Mr. Hawke would carry Florence away. This is but the first step."

"The first step to what?" my uncle asked.
"Why, to a long tour abroad in the hope of curing Florence of her liking for me."

"I quite agree with you," said my aunt; "and if Mr. Hawke decides upon leaving England, I should never be surprised to hear that young Mr. Morecombe has accompanied him and his daughter."

"Well, if he goes he can't take his house with him," said my uncle; "he is bound to come back sooner or later; so that all you have to do, Jack, is to lay in a good stock of tobacco and wait here for your friends to heave in sight."

"Fancy Jack being the first to meet them at the railway station on their return after an absence

of three or four years," said Amelia, laughing.
" How pleased Mr. Hawke would be to see him ! "

" There's nothing funny that I can see," exclaimed Sophie, looking at me sympathetically. " The meaning of it to you, Jack, is that Florence is in love with you, and that her papa thinks he can change her mind by changing the scene. He is very much mistaken ; and so long as you can feel that she is faithful it ought to be all the same whether she is in Clifton or Scotland."

" Sophie, it is really no business of ours, my love," said her mother mildly but significantly. " We all wish Mr. Jack every success in his difficult courtship ; but under the circumstances there must be some little impropriety in your identifying yourself with it too zealously."

" I love Florence and I love my cousin, mamma," said Sophie, " and I do not like to see them unhappy."

I jumped from my chair, ran round the table, and kissed her. It was the first kiss I had ever given the dear girl, and a heartier smack of the lips was never administered. " It is the only way in which I can thank you for your speech, my darling," said I ; and I returned to my chair, leaving Sophie blushing, Amelia rather pale, my aunt alarmed, and my uncle grinning from ear to ear.

CHAPTER XIV.

I RETURN TO LONDON.

WELL, sure enough, Florence was carried off to Scotland next day by her papa and Aunt Damaris ; with them went Emily, and Clifton Lodge was left in charge of the butler and the house-keeper. Never did I pass such a night as that which preceded my darling's departure. Sleep ! Bless your heart alive, mates, never in an all-night job at sea, bending brand-new canvas, amid a whirling darkness of spume and vapour, in the room of the shreds which streamed from hanks and jackstays and boltropes, reducing sail bit by bit, heaving to, standing by for those quarter-deck yells which were never long in coming, was I wider awake. Over and over again I made up my mind to follow her next day—to hang about the station until she and the others arrived, and then jump into the train with them ; and I only succeeded in dissuading myself from that suicidal project by vowing that I would be up and away for the North the instant Sophie was

able to tell me in what part of Scotland old Hawke had come to a stand. I must have lighted and extinguished my candle a dozen times that night, for I would bundle out of the sheets and walk about the bedroom, reading Florence's letter to Sophie and looking at her likeness, and then roll into bed again and put out the light in the hope of falling asleep, and afterwards turn to and have another scratch at the lucifer box to satisfy some doubt by taking a fresh squint at the letter, and so on and so on until the sun arose and the blessed dickybirds chirped.

The only crumb of comfort I could find lay in what my uncle had suggested—that the letter to Sophie was really meant for me. I was in her thoughts when she wrote, as the postscript proved. Me it was for whom the news of her going to Scotland was intended. That reference to her being under Aunt Damaris' wing was to let me know why she had given me no chance of seeing her. And what was the postscript but like asking me if I meant to forget her because her papa was taking her away? Forget her! as often as I read that sweet P.S. so often would I kiss her likeness; and I desire here to make my compliments to the French gentleman who photographed her on the indelibility of his printing, for had the portrait been an effaceable thing I was bound to have kissed away every trace of my pet's face and figure, ay, as

completely as a shower of rain takes the curl out of a feather.

But, oh! in spite of her letter, in spite of the encouragement I found in it, the prospect of her absence, the cooling effect that might be produced in her by my being out of sight, the possibility of young Morecombe forming one of the party, the result of the formidable influence which would now be exerted by the combined powers of Alphonso and Damaris Hawke, rendered contemplation absolutely hideous. I was harassed by a misgiving as heavy as a presentiment that this was but the first of old Hawke's steps, and that the next would carry him and Florence out of the United Kingdom, leagues beyond the reach of my slender purse. No doubt in time the old fellow would return and bring his daughter with him; but suppose Morecombe accompanied them, and Florence, sick of travelling and worried by her aunt and papa, consented to marry him; or suppose in their journeys they met some agreeable young man who'd shove me overboard out of Florence's heart; or suppose that travel enlarged her mind to such an extent as to make her admit to her father that though she declined to marry Morecombe she now saw that he was right in his notion that a young seafaring chap on a small income, without prospects or occupation, was not after all quite up to the mark as a match for a young lady who was a beauty and would have a fortune?

But it is a mistake to suppose. Half the misery of life lies in it. They have a good saying at sea : “ Suppose your aunt had whiskers, what a very rum uncle she would make ! ”

Well, my lads, the Hawke family went away to Scotland that day. I knew they were gone by taking a walk in the afternoon past Clifton Lodge, and observing that the blinds were down as though somebody lay dead in the house.

However, before a week had gone by I discovered, now that Florence was three or four hundred miles distant, that my Bristol lodgings were altogether too small and dull to be tolerable. Mrs. Chump became an eyesore ; the prospect over the way a mortification every time I looked out of window. I was tired of Bristol city, and though I could have spent another month or two very happily at my uncle's house, where the evenings were always cheerful and the days full of the business of driving and riding and dining, and so forth, yet as I did not choose to return, heartily welcome as I knew I should be, I made up my mind to go to London and await news of Florence from Sophie ; for in London I could make time fly faster than ever I could drive it in the country, and all that I desired now was to get rid of the weeks during which Florence was to be absent from Clifton. I announced my intention to my relatives on an occasion when we were all together. They tried hard to persuade me

to return to them, but I was firm, I was conscientious, I was highly moral. No ! it was a question of delicacy : I desired that Mr. Hawke might fully understand that my aunt and family had no share in the courtship I had undertaken : and with many thanks therefore I declined to be their guest.

"I won't call you a swab again, Jack, because you didn't like it before," said my uncle, "but if I knew of another word to express the same thing, dash my wig if I wouldn't bestow it upon you."

My aunt and Sophie, however, came to my rescue, particularly my aunt, who said that though she was very sorry I refused to stay with them, yet she thoroughly respected the feelings which made me decline.

"And how long d'ye mean to stop in London ?" said my uncle.

I looked at Sophie and answered, "It will depend."

"What will Florence say when she returns and finds that her faithful shepherd has given up watching the landscape which has been sanctified by the feet of his lovely Chloe ?" asked Amelia.

I gave her a nod and a smile, as much to say, "Don't trouble yourself : I'll arrange for all that."

"Jack knows his own business," said my uncle ; "we have no right to interrogate him, more especially since we have all been prohibited from having a finger in his pie," looking at his wife.

And so the matter ended, so far as this particular passage was concerned : though that same evening, being alone with Sophie, I had a long talk with her, in which I gave her all my reasons for not stopping at her house, and then went on to explain that my wits were growing rusty in the Bristol lodgings, which were horribly dull, and that a return to London would freshen me up and enable me to apply myself with livelier spirits, if not with a sturdier resolution, to the job of winning Florence Hawke.

" My programme then is this, Jack, is it ? " said she ; " if Florence writes to me from Scotland I am to answer her letter, and to speak of you in it."

" Yes."

" What shall I say about you ? "

" All that you like—all that I feel, Sophie. Tell her that I grew dull in lodgings, that I have returned to London to recruit my spirits, and to kill the horribly tedious time which her absence makes life to be, but that I shall come to Bristol by the first train that follows your letter in which you inform me she has arrived."

" Very well," said Sophie ; " mamma can't object, for it is really only *news*, and one must say something when one writes a letter. But suppose my epistle should fall into Mr. Hawke's hands ? "

" There's a risk in everything," I replied ; " we must take our chance. If Florence wishes to hear

from you—in the hope of hearing about me—I dare say she will manage to receive the letter and keep it to herself."

"Well, we'll see first whether she writes, and I can then decide how to act by what she says," exclaimed Sophie. "And what else must I do?"

"Keep a look-out for my darling—get any news that you can lay hold of, and forward it to me slap!"

"On which you will come to Bristol?"

"Yes."

"To your present lodgings?"

"Well, I don't know: I'll see about that," said I.

"And what is your policy afterwards?" said Sophie.

"Why," cried I, "to meet her as often as I can, to get her to own that she loves me, to hang on to her with my very eyelashes sooner than let go, and—and—yes, Sophie," said I, grasping her arm, "if her father refuses his sanction, if she will consent, to—to—"

"What!" whispered Sophie, looking thrilled: "not an elopement?"

"A secret marriage," I exclaimed. "Why not; would it be the first that had ever taken place? If it is to be pull devil pull baker between Hawke and me, the weakest must be dragged. I don't want anything clandestine. Much as I hate

marriage ceremonies, with their favours, speeches, dresses, and blubberings, I'd rather go through fifty weddings with my sweetheart than bolt with her. But if Florence loves me and I love her, and we're resolved to have each other and Hawke won't hear of it, what's the right step? Yield to the old man? Never!" cried I, brandishing my fist.

Sophie's fat face was full of emotion. "Upon my word, Jack," she exclaimed, "I believe you'll end in making a real romance of your love. What desperate ideas you have! I'm sure Florence ought to feel very much flattered."

But let me coil these lengths of plans down, and hang them over the pin they belong to out of the road, for when I come to think how they, like a good many other schemes I have formed in my life, warped me not an inch forward, though all the beef that was in me I applied to the capstan bar as I shouted, I feel ashamed to write them. I want to put nothing but the truth into these loggings, and arrangements that never came to anything somehow don't strike me as facts. You might as well describe dreams or reveries as plans from which as little emerged as would come from an empty eggshell under a sitting fowl. And these, my hearties, are the unpleasantest parts a man can light upon whilst spinning the yarn of his own doings; for nothing proves to him more shrewdly how big a fool he has been in his day, than his

having to confess to a foresight which was about as perceptive as if he had tied his head up in a bag. How bigwigs like chancellors and statesmen who want posterity to respect them for their wisdom can have the courage to sit down and write about their lives, hang me if I can imagine ; unless, indeed, they make a lie of their yarns by omitting whatever would show that at bottom they were not very much wiser than you or me. But avast now ! we've had enough of philosophering, as an old shipmate of mine called all ideas which oblige a man to scratch the back of his head and heave-to for words.

It was about a week after Florence had gone to Scotland that I went away to London. Mrs. Chump was sorry to lose me. I dare say she would have risked her salvation to the extent of saying I was out when I was in had I agreed to stop on those terms. But her lodgings were too small ; there was no kind of figure to be cut in them ; they were as dull as a forepeak ; and so I gave them up for good, having resolved to seek bigger and better-looking rooms when I returned. I pass over the leave-taking from my relations. I wanted to hand over the balance of the fifty pounds my uncle had given me, but the moment I opened my mouth on that subject he fell into a passion, asked me what I took him to be, eyed me from head to foot, and inquired in a cold voice whether I

was imposing upon him when I said I had been to sea, since no sailor man would treat a relation so ill as to offer to return a gift. "That sort of thing," said he, "only happens between sweethearts. When Florence has become thick enough with you to receive your gewgaws, then when you and she quarrel and she sends your Brummagem stuff back, you may pocket it—there's no insult. But to offer to return a gift—not a loan—but a *gift* to a gentleman you're on good terms with—roast me, if you don't deserve to be rope's-ended."

So I kept the money, nor can I conscientiously say that it went against my grain to do so; for after all, why shouldn't a well-to-do uncle tip his nephew? and what's fifty pounds? Why, I could spend twice that money in a week; and then, faith, have little enough to keep by me in memory of it.

I was pleased to observe that my aunt did not much like saying good-bye to me. I dare say she thought that, on the whole, she had not acted very maternally towards the motherless shell-back who had given his heart to a beauty and had no friend, if he had not his relations, to say a word for him or give him a hand. She held on to me when we bade each other farewell, said a hundred kind things, and almost gave me to understand that if I went away counting upon Sophie she was not disposed to baulk my hopes. My cousins accompanied me to the station, and I had a confidential chat with

Sophie on the platform, whilst Amelia stood a little apart in respectful recognition of the mission her kind, affectionate, loyal sister had made her own.

"You shall hear without fail," said she, "the moment I get the news of Florence's return."

"And you will write her a letter all about me when you hear from her, and you'll send me her letter, Sophie? And I wish that you would look about at your leisure for some comfortable rooms, nearer to Clifton Lodge than my lodgings were . . ." And I was mumbling on when the guard interrupted me by a loud "Jump in, please, sir, if you're going." "God bless you, Sophie; I shall never forget what you have done and are doing. We shall meet again soon. Good-bye, Amelia;" and in a few minutes Bristol city was astern of me.

CHAPTER XV.

A TERRIBLE BLOW.

As well as I can remember, I had been about two months absent from London when I returned to it ; though when I entered my rooms and looked about me and thought of the day when my uncle drove up and introduced himself and gave me that invitation to Clifton which had ruined my peace of mind, ay, as completely as if I had committed a forgery or set fire to a church, it seemed that a year, and a very long one too, had elapsed since then. But I had not been in town a couple of days before I discovered that I should have enjoyed an easier mind had I stopped in Bristol. I had hoped to find the time bowl along ; I reckoned upon getting some amusement out of my old town habits, and returning to my courtship the fresher for the change. But I mistook. London I found so insipid that a positive loathing for it came over me. My club was a bore, and the gossip of the men there, their cheap talk about the new actress, Jenkins' last novel, the

quarrel between the two Q.C.'s, and the like impertinence, flat, flatulent, and rank. The tragedian I had formerly considered a great artist I found now to be a poor mouthing impostor, a sham made up of hair and gasps, and I remember wishing I had him at sea when his yawling drove me away before the end of the first act.

The truth is, I ought to have stopped at Bristol. In London I was peevish, irritable, moody ; nothing was congenial ; there was no one whose arm I could take and pour out my heart to ; I felt the solitude described by Byron when he speaks of a man being alone in crowds, and again and again called myself an ass for not sticking to the country where I could have gone on musing over fell and flood. At Bristol I had Sophie ; there was Clifton Lodge to look at ; there were spots full of lovely memories. But London ! it was all shoving and elbowing in the streets, not even a shop window that I could fix upon as having been consecrated by Florence's gaze, and I had nothing but her adorable likeness to console me. However, since I had come to London I made up my mind to stop until I should hear of my darling's arrival at Bristol, and I did not want my relations to think me capricious and unstable by returning and so making myself out as not knowing what to be at. Meanwhile I wrote to Sophie pretty nearly every other day, venting myself in such a style that I have no doubt, were I

now to see my letters to her, I should feel very heartily ashamed of myself. She always answered me punctually, and somehow always managed to make out a long letter, though the dear girl had very little news to give me ; but her sympathy was delightful, and she contrived to apologize for Florence not writing to her from Scotland, so artfully—she invented so many able excuses for my sweetheart's silence—that for a pretty good spell of time I do not recollect very keenly feeling the disappointment of opening her letters and finding no second inclosure. She might be ill, Sophie would suggest ; or perhaps she had made up her mind not to write until she could see her way to receive a reply unknown to her papa, who, of course, was not likely to sanction any correspondence between her and the Miss Seymours ; or she might be under a kind of restraint through Aunt Damaris' vigilance.

Well, Sophie's excuses for Florence satisfied me, as I have said, for a time ; but when letter after letter arrived from my cousin without a word from my darling, my soul grew very grievously worried. Her waiting "in order to see her way to receive a reply unknown to her papa" would not do ; it did not satisfy me. She might write, anyway ; and if she could not get Sophie's answer without the risk of her father plumping upon it, then let her request my cousin not to address a letter to her. Was

Aunt Damaris prevailing? Was young Morecombe with her, and gathering headway? Was absence, instead of making the heart grow fonder, doing the other thing? I arrived at such a pass that I would sometimes say to myself, “Jack, you fool, it is all up. Your dream is over, my lad. This is your first love affair—you see what it has come to. The girl was never in earnest. She enjoyed your being so and helped you to sink, because all women like admiration, and there’s no flattery like a man’s love. *That’s* real; words may mean anything, but love’s a fact, something to lean against, something to catch hold of. What will you do now?” I write light-heartedly of that time; but as a bit of living experience it did this for me: it filled me for the rest of my life with compassion for man or woman who loves honestly and is deceived. There are many human troubles over which the world makes merry, and disappointed love is among them; for that, perhaps, we have to thank the old comedy writers and our latter-day cynics, who are somewhat sensitive in their way, too, though very bitter; but depend upon it, mates, a young, generous, affectionate heart deceived in its first love so suffers as to be a mournful sight. Other loves may follow, the first wound may be healed, the scar effaced, but whilst that wound is fresh the torment is sharp enough to make even a monkey who shall witness it pensive; and I would as soon now think of jeering

at the nipping and blasting of the first pure bud put forth by human affection as of ridiculing a person praying, or laughing at a mother weeping over her dead first-born.

However, I had not to wait over long before coming to an answer to my question, What will you do now? for one morning—and this made the time very nearly a month since Florence Hawke had gone to Scotland—there came a letter from Sophie, the bulkiest I had ever had from her, and when I opened it I found four pages of crossed handwriting from Florence, with half a dozen of lines from my cousin, who struck so dismal a note in the very little she said that I am able to recall every syllable of it from the memory of the consternation it raised in me. “My poor dear Jack,” she began—think of that: *poor* dear Jack!—“it is with deep sorrow I send you Florence’s letter. I fear it will greatly affect you, because nobody knows so well as I how fond you are of her. Yet you would not forgive me if I did not keep my promise to forward any letter she should write. You must cheer up and try to look this thing bravely in the face, and if Florence and you are fated *not* to come together, why, then, what can you do but console yourself by remembering that there are as good fish left in the sea as ever came out of it? Yours affectionately, SOPHIE SEYMOUR.”

Lads, I’ll not attempt to describe my feeling

when I read this. I was all of a tremble, as old chimney hags say. I rushed to the conclusion that my darling had been urged to accept Mr. Morecombe, and was going to be married to him in due course ; and the groan that echoed through Sophie's letter resounded down to the very bottom of my soul. I took up Florence's closely-written sheet, and fell to spelling it over with ashen lips. But as I made my way into the network of words—why will girls cross their letters ; is not paper cheap enough ?—a sensation very different from the one first excited was produced in me. It was a kind of despair, too, but of the nature of a pure balsam to my heart after the desperate throb that had first wrenched it. The letter was addressed to Sophie and dated at Dunkeld, and my darling began by explaining that she had deferred writing to Sophie until she was able to communicate something positive. “We have been here a fortnight,” wrote she, “and during that time I have watched matters gradually shaping themselves to the point we have arrived at, and about which I am at last able to write definitely.” I gathered that there had been a good many “scenes.” Aunt Damaris had taken her in hand and remonstrated with her for rejecting Mr. Morecombe. The young fellow called upon them in London, but did not accompany them to the North. What Aunt Damaris saw of him delighted her. She was lost in amazement

that Florence could refuse so handsome, so well-bred, so aristocratic a youth. "I will not repeat," my adorable girl wrote, "the arguments she and papa have used to try and make me accept a person I *never could* like. Between them they have made me truly unhappy. Indeed, papa seems quite to have lost control over his temper, and never neglects a chance to speak insultingly of your cousin, though I have solemnly declared to him that Mr. Jack Seymour has had no more to do with my refusing Mr. Morecombe than he had with the eclipse of the moon that took place last month. The truth is, dear Sophie, having made me low-spirited and unhappy by incessantly worrying me about Mr. Morecombe, papa and Aunt Damaris have at last persuaded themselves that I am pining with secret love, and what do you suppose they have decided on? I am to accompany Aunt Damaris to Sydney next month! She sails on the 28th in the *Strathmore*, the ship she came in, so that I have three weeks before me in which to return to Clifton Lodge, make arrangements for the voyage, and bid you all good-bye. What will you say to this? and do you ask what *I* think? Well, dear, I cannot pretend that I am sorry. I am not very happy just now at home. Papa does not, I am sure, mean all he says, but he is crazy about Mr. Morecombe, and I may tell you in *strict* confidence he is afraid of your cousin—how

stupid men are!—and I have to thank Aunt Damaris for proposing this voyage, which is of course planned with the idea of *clearing my mind* and making it fit to receive the lovely image of Mr. Morecombe. I shall regret to leave Clifton and my friends, but I do not dislike the idea of the voyage. It will be a treat to me to see dear old Sydney again, and I am never happier than when on the broad ocean. How long I shall be away it is quite impossible to guess; eighteen months or two years, I dare say." There was a great deal more in her letter than this, but all that concerns my yarn I have given.

Well, as I have said, the truth came as a kind of relief to me after the fears which Sophie's note had excited. I had made up my mind to hear that she was going to be married to Mr. Morecombe; and so passionately did I love her that had that been the news I do believe it would have affected me as much as if I had heard that she was dying. But though the first movement of my mind was comparatively one of pleasure, when I read the letter and found that let her relatives worry and bully her as much as they pleased they could not persuade her to take Mr. Morecombe, yet when my mind received the full meaning of her father's intention to send her to the other end of the world, I felt positively crushed, and sat like a fool staring at the letter in my hand, unable to form any ideas and incapable

of understanding more than that some thousands of miles of ocean were to be put between my darling and me, and that many a long month must pass before we should see each other, if indeed we ever again met. As you know, I had for some time feared that a great deal of what would prove bad to me was to happen. I had calculated upon her father carrying her out of England and roaming with her about Europe until, as I have before said, he might flatter himself he had travelled me clean out of her sphere and educated her into a proper conception of the merits of the youth he wanted her to marry ; but never had I reckoned upon his sending her to Australia—that is to say the other side of the globe—right away past the Cape of Good Hope and across the Southern Ocean ! And yet now that this thing was settled upon, I saw that it was more likely he would send his daughter to her native land along with her aunt, than turn to and make a martyr of himself by hauling her about Spain and France and such countries. Australia sounds a long way off, but even as a sailing voyage it is no serious business, and if Hawke supposed that I was at the bottom of his daughter's refusal of Mr. Morecombe, if he considered that I had made her fond of me, and that the only chance he had to bring her into his way of thinking was to put the horizon between her and me, then you can't say he was ill-advised in seizing the opportunity of his

sister's return to Sydney to despatch his daughter with her to that place.

But as for *me*—what was now to do, mates ? For a whole hour, maybe, I sat glaring at Florence's letter ; and then something resembling my senses coming to me, I wrote four or five pages to Sophie in which I declared that my heart was broken, that I had a dreadful presentiment upon me that Florence and I were never to meet again, that as to her one day returning, why, if I found three or four weeks insupportable without the prospect of meeting her, how was I to endure her absence for two years with the certainty of being hopelessly forgotten by her long before she returned ! In short my letter came very near to being a piece of delirium ; nevertheless it did me good to write it, and I took care before sealing the envelope to tell Sophie to endeavour to communicate what I had said to Florence, that she might know what a miserable bruised worm she would leave wriggling on Britannia's soil behind her when she sailed.

CHAPTER XVI.

A GRAND IDEA.

I do not know at what hour of that blessed day the glimmer of the notion that came to grow into a determined scheme might have been visible upon my mind ; I reckon it would be in the evening. But be this as it may, I was sitting in my lodgings with Florence's letter in my hand, when on a sudden I found myself thinking, “*Strathmore—Strathmore*—why, that's the name of one of the ships belonging to the employ I was in. She will be an Australian liner too ; ” and I took up a daily newspaper and ran down the shipping advertisements, and after a little lighted upon this :

“ For Sydney direct, taking passengers at through rates to other ports in Australia and New Zealand, for which a separate arrangement must be made, the magnificent composite clipper ship *Strathmore*, 100, a 1, 1,381 tons register, Daniel Thompson, Commander ; lying for inspection in the East India Docks. This favourite regular trading vessel is one

of the fastest ships in the Australian trade. Her cabins are elegantly fitted and supplied with every convenience, including beds and bedding. She will carry a surgeon. For further particulars apply to Duncan, Golightly, & Co., Fenchurch Street, London."

This then was the *Strathmore*, sister ship to the *Portia*, my last vessel, owned by my late employers; and unless there was more than one man of the same name in that service she was commanded by an old shipmate of mine, Daniel Thompson, who had been second mate of the *Montrose* when I was in her as third. Now ever since I had given up the sea as a profession my thoughts and tastes had held so steadily landwards that I don't remember I had once gone so far as even to glance at the shipping advertisements in search of a familiar name, whilst during the three years I had been ashore I was never nearer to the region where the docks of the port of London lie than Leadenhall Street. Nor (perhaps because I stuck tenaciously to the west end of the town) had I in all that time crossed the path of a former shipmate. Stay! three months after I had been ashore I met a third mate I knew, slightly disguised in liquor, in Waterloo Place. He would have lovingly embraced me, but I dodged his arms and sent him off happy with the loan of half a sovereign, which he said would be all the money he had in the

world ; but he was the only sailor-man of my acquaintance I had encountered since I left the sea.

This long severance from my old life made it seem a great way off, and when I read the name of *Strathmore* and Daniel Thompson, memories which appeared to belong to another world rose up, and I fell a-musing whilst, without the least presentiment of what was to come from this new train of thought, I raked about in the dust of my mind for recollections and constructed a picture with them of my seafaring days. There are a great many miracles in this world, from the animalcule you can't see down to the man so constituted by nature as to be able to raise his foot to a woman ; but there is nothing in that line to beat the mechanism of thinking ; the way in which the imagination catches hold of the crank of the mind and turns it, bringing up idea after idea, all in a beautiful and logical procession, just as you may see a steam-winch rattling up "notions" from the hold of a ship at a discharging berth. The sight of that advertisement about the *Strathmore*, and my old shipmate Dan Thompson, sent me to sea again right out of hand, and though I was within a pistol-shot of Regent Street, with the roar of rolling omnibuses and cabs in the air, and the smell of London strong in my nostrils, I was as much upon the ocean as I sat in

my armchair with the newspaper on my knee and my eyes fixed upon the wall, as though the Pacific Ocean was around me and the ship eighty days out. I had boarded the *Strathmore* in Sydney Bay, and as she was built by the firm who had turned out the *Portia* and was constructed on the same lines, was of the same measurement as that vessel and fitted exactly like her, why, you may suppose when I put myself upon her poop in fancy, I saw her as clear as a man might figure the wife of his bosom by recalling her appearance. One thought led to another. I pictured Florence aboard, Captain Thompson mightily taken by her beauty, and giving her his arm for a walk to windward whenever there was seaway enough to make such gallanting reasonable ; then the bright picture of the cuddy as I would remember it on fine days came up, with its table agleam with damask and glass, stewards wandering around it, a pleasant company of ladies and gentlemen eating and drinking, and I figured Florence among them, and anon rose the fancy of the breathless tropical evening, the moon in the south, the dew like diamond dust upon the rails and skylights, and Florence standing alone, looking away into the infinite leagues of gloom.

Now it was at this, or at some point of my reflections very near to it, when the sense of her going away and the conception of the unmeasurable

miles which would separate her from me when she had sailed, had cut into my heart like a knife, bringing down a whole flood of those internal tears which men who have never wept since they were in petticoats have shed again and again at times of misery in their lives—at this point of my reverie, I say, an idea flashed upon me that caught my breath like a blow in the side; an extraordinary exultation seemed to swell my head to four times its proper dimensions. Do you smile at that, mates? Well, next time you are rendered hysterically joyful, note the sensation in your head and hair. And in a trice I had sprung out of my chair and was walking about the room as hard as my legs would carry me, my cheeks burning with the sudden excitement.

And what do you suppose it was that had put these heels to my spirits and was working in me like a pint of proof rum? Nothing more than the simple question asked by some faculty inside me I'm willing to call divine: *Why don't you go to sea with Florence?* It was a revelation, a grand possibility, and as easy to do as calling a cab and driving to a railway station. How was it that the idea did not instantly occur to me when I read Florence's letter? I'm sure I cannot tell you. I was rendered maudlin and muddy by the news, I suppose, and could only see out of one eye. But now that the notion had come to me it was as

simple to understand as boxing the compass, and when I had worked off my delirium by bowling about the room, I lighted a pipe and sat down to trim the noble scheme, and to set the whole matter square and shipshape in my brains.

It was one of those adventures indeed which no man could be better qualified to undertake than a sailor, and in a score of respects might I reckon myself privileged. First of all I had no calling to detain me at home ; I was an independent man, and it was all the same to me whether I lived in London or Bristol, or voyaged to Australia. Next I had the means to pay for my passage, which would not impoverish me either, for whether I stayed at home or went to sea as a passenger I should have to live, and it would not cost me more to live at sea than if I stayed at home. Third, if the Captain Daniel Thompson whose name was advertised as the *Strathmore's* commander was the same person who had been second mate of the *Montrose* when I was in that vessel, then I should be associated with an old friend to whom I could explain the object of my voyage, and whose help I could count upon. I name but a few of the advantages under which I should embark on this adventure. As to what good might come of the voyage, I did not allow that consideration to trouble me. Was it not enough that my scheme promised me several months of constant inter-

course with my darling? Conceive my feelings when I reflected upon being locked up in a ship with Florence. Why, down at Bristol, as you know, I was lurking about and could not get even to *see* her; only just now I had sent a long-winded letter to Sophie telling her I was sure I should never meet my heart's delight again; and here, in a jiffy, comes a scheme which would enable me to be by her side or within sight and sound of her hour after hour, no Alphonso Hawke to loom close at hand and seowl me away, no one to interfere but an aunt who had never set eyes on me, and who should never know, if I could help it, who I was.

The prospect took such complete possession of me that I remained indoors the whole evening, and sat thinking over it far into the night. When at last I went to bed I lay there very restless, picturing the voyage, thinking of my darling and myself at sea, plotting all sorts of courtesies and attentions to Miss Damaris Hawke so as to win her regard, and then fell asleep to dream that I was on a raft alone with Florence in the middle of the ocean, and that we were rescued by a steamboat commanded by Mr. Morecombe, who flourished a telescope upon the paddle-box, and shouted “Ease her!” and “Back her!” like any Thames penny skipper.

Next morning I received a letter from my uncle,

four lines only, saying that he would be in London on that day, and asking me to lunch with him at the Great Western Hotel. I was very willing to lunch with him, but ought I to open my mind—I mean could I trust him with the secret of my project? Suppose my aunt, influenced by neighbourly feelings, should deem it her duty to apprise Mr. Hawke of my intention to accompany his daughter to Australia. Was that likely? I could not be sure: and not being sure, ought I to jeopardize my noble scheme in the least degree by speaking about it to those who were pretty certain to repeat what I said? These considerations worried me until it was time to start for Paddington, and then I finally decided to sound my uncle first, to talk with a great deal of caution, and to trim as I might find the wind blowing.

I found him waiting for me in a private room in the hotel, and when I was ushered in he ordered lunch to be served, saying he was half dead with famine. He asked me how I was, and I inquired after my aunt and cousins; and these civilities being over, he exclaimed, “I am glad to see you with some colour in your cheek, Jack. I expected to behold a scarecrow—a skeleton with its clothes hanging loose upon it.”

“Why?” said I. “Do you think I have been ill?”

“No, no! I judge from what Sophie told me.

She had a letter from you this morning—a regular twister. She wouldn't show it me, nor would I have had time to read it, for I barely saved the express by one minute. But she said you were very unhappy, and roast me if you could have made her grieve more had you asked her to your funeral and then hanged yourself."

"It is true," said I, "when I wrote, that I was miserable enough. You know of course that Florence is to be packed off to Australia?"

"When you wrote you were miserable enough? Aren't you so now?" he inquired.

"Yes," said I, "very."

"How's your appetite, Jack?"

"I'm quite ready for lunch," I answered.

He burst into a laugh and was about to speak, but smothered up his words in a cough as the waiter entered. We took our seats at the table, and whilst we lunched my uncle went away from all reference to Florence and Australia and my misery by telling me the object of his visit to town: which was, I think, for I cannot clearly remember, to buy some building land at Clifton, and he was somewhat lively in his abuse of a solicitor who had left him about ten minutes before my arrival. And yet I could not help taking notice that all the while he was chattering he looked at me as if there was something in his thoughts behind what he was saying. At last, when

the waiter had cleared out and left us alone, he fell into a short silence, inspecting me contemplatively, and then says he, "So, Jack, you are to lose Florence?"

"I hope not," I replied.

"But you know she's going to Australia?"

"Yes."

"That's about 12,000 miles off, isn't it?" said he.

"Call it 12,000," I replied.

"A deuce of a separation, 12,000 miles," he exclaimed; "and all water, mind. No railways from here to Australia, my lad: and there's a mighty pause between the posting of a letter and the getting a reply to it."

"Don't make me utterly miserable, uncle," said I.

He eyed me with a look made up of amusement and inquisitiveness. "Do you know," cried he, "you don't appear half miserable enough. You're like Steele's mute; the more you get the jollier you look. What will Sophie think when I tell her of your appetite, and that instead of being a shadow you seem to be fatter than when I last saw you?"

"She'll think that I'm too much occupied in groping about after daylight to be broken down," I replied, feeling my way with him, as I imagined.

He took another long stare at me, and then cocking his eye in a manner peculiar to himself, he said, "I wonder what's in your mind? I wonder

if what's there resembles what's here?" tapping his forehead. "I don't believe there's an atom of blarney about your feeling for Florence, and consequently you're a deal too comfortable and pleasant in your behaviour, there's too much satisfaction mixed up in your face not to give one a notion that if you felt yourself up a tree yesterday when you wrote your *Paradise Lost* of a letter to Sophie—in her hand, man, it looked as long as Mahomet's al Koran—you've managed somehow to slide down out of it since. Am I right?"

I smiled, but made no answer.

"Jack," said he, laughing, "we have both of us been sailors, and I'll lay you fifty dollars that we've plumped upon the same notion."

"What is yours?" said I.

"Why," cried he, raising his hand and bringing it down upon his knee, "what could it be, man—if you're in earnest, as I am sure you are—but that you should accompany her to Australia?"

In the face of this I instantly chucked all the considerations which had bothered me clean overboard.

"You have hit it," I exclaimed. "That's my intention. If Florence sails for Australia I shall go with her."

"Bravo!" he shouted, rolling about in his chair in a kind of ecstasy. "I knew you'd do it—it's the Seymour spirit—a fair grip, and old Nick may

shriek for mercy. But think of the same notion occurring to us both! It came slap into me the moment I heard old Hawke meant to ship his daughter off. Oh, I'm wicked to enjoy it—I'm wicked to enjoy it! But, man alive! think of Alphonso's feelings when some little bird whispers to him that Jack Seymour has sailed in the ship that was to have carried Florence away from the rogue's pursuit! He called me no gentleman, d'ye remember?" And he rolled about in his chair until I was afraid that he would capsize head over heels.

I waited until he recovered himself, and then looked at him with a grave face whilst I addressed him in my soberest tone, for the project was a very serious business to me, and I desired that he should take the same view of it, that I might have the benefit of his advice.

"Uncle," said I, "I think it will be best to conceal my intentions from my aunt and cousins."

"Certainly," he answered; "I would not have them know it on any consideration. They have concerned themselves enough in this love-bout of yours, and they must not have the least suspicion of your latest scheme. Hawke then may think what he likes."

"Taking that view, it is a pity," said I, "that *you* should know anything about it."

"Well, I'm not obliged to know," he answered.

"I shan't see you off: and you may change your mind at the last moment for all I am to imagine. But I say, Jack, have you really and seriously planned this job?"

"I have, indeed," I exclaimed with energy. "If Florence is to be expatriated I'll share her banishment: and there is not quite enough in a voyage to Australia to frighten me into giving up the girl I love. And besides, there are several points in my favour: the *Strathmore* belongs to my old employ: I know her skipper well; and then the cost of my keep afloat will be less than I should have to spend ashore."

"But what will you do when you get to Sydney?" asked my uncle, talking as gravely as I could wish. "Come home again?"

"Not without Florence," said I: "that is, if I can make the passage out answer the purpose I have in my mind."

"I'm not asking questions from any impertinent motives," said he. "I don't want you to go and strand yourself t'other side the world. What's the passage money—do you know?"

"A cabin in the cuddy will cost me about sixty pounds."

"One hundred and twenty pounds there and back—feeding included—say ten months in all. Yes," said he, "it will be a cheaper job for you at sea than ashore. Nor could you live so well

ashore for one hundred and twenty pounds as you will as a first-class passenger. But don't forget that Aunt Damaris goes with Florence—she has her under her wing—and she will fight with swelling feathers and distended beak if you come within pistol-shot of the girl."

"Yes," said I, "but I shall have the advantage of sparring with her on an element she's not used to, but which has been my cradle. Besides," I continued, "I don't know why there should be any fighting. Perhaps my scheme may comprise an *alias*, for if my comfort is to be insured by borrowing a name I ought not to find it hard to fit myself with a good one."

He held up his hand, laughing. "Don't tell me too much!" he exclaimed. "Keep me honest by being reserved, for Heaven's sake! But oh, man, it's a fine scheme—a canny notion! What would I give to be twenty-five, with such a job on hand?" I thought, as he spoke, that I could trace in his look something of the old love of devilry which, my father used to say, had procured his despatch to sea. If you *do* borrow a name," he continued, "take a big one—something long and fine, with a De in front of it. Nothing like a De—it's even better than a Le. There's a Norman touch about De that makes people think of William the Conqueror. But Florence will know you?" cried he suddenly. "You can't deceive *her*, unless you

make up as a priest or something of that kind. Do you intend *that*, too?"

"No," said I, laughing. "I must take my chance of Florence keeping my identity a secret from her aunt. If she won't, why then I must brave it out with Aunt Damaris and do the best I can for myself."

"And the skipper you spoke of—he's an old friend of yours, you say? He'll be knowing you."

"Oh," said I, "if he's the Dan Thompson I was shipmate with he'll keep my secret—he'll help me; I have nothing to fear from him."

By this time, seeing how thoroughly in earnest I was, he had become as grave as a judge, and the kindly paternal manner I had before taken notice of in him when we talked together at Clifton was now very marked. He said he had been a good deal surprised on hearing of Hawke's intention to send Florence to Australia. It was difficult to understand the motive of so extreme a step. Allowing that the girl was in love with me, we were surely to be kept apart without the intervention of three oceans. But what bothered him most, he said, was this: in sending Florence to Australia her father would be as effectually separating her from Morecombe as he hoped to separate her from me. What was to be made of such a policy? Did it mean that Morecombe had withdrawn in disgust, and that Aunt Damaris had

prescribed a journey to the other end of the world as the only safe remedy against me? "Hang me," said he, "if I could have the heart to send one of my girls a-trooping in this fashion, even with an aunt. How long is she to be away, d'ye know?"

I answered she had written to Sophie that she might be absent two years.

"And of course she'll bring back the same disposition that she took," he exclaimed. "Climate doesn't change the character, and as to the ocean, why the old fellow couldn't choose a worse field for her—no variety, no change to occupy her, to carry her old thoughts away, nothing but just the sort of monotony that most forces the mind in upon itself and sets it feeding upon memory as a monkey munches his own tail. But all this is my friend Alphonso's business, not mine; I dare say he thinks he knows what he is about, and that he applauds his own cleverness. What do *you* mean to do when you arrive at Sydney?"

"I have not troubled myself to think, and don't mean to bother myself until I get there," said I.

"I reckon you'll be praying for contrary winds," said he. "I wish I could invent an excuse to go along with you. I am often feeling as if I want to be sailing round the world. But I say, Jack, you must make sure that your sweet-heart sails in the *Strathmore* before hiring a berth.

You'd be the biter bit with a vengeance, my lad, to jump abroad and find when you're half-way across the Bay of Biscay that there is no such person as Florence Hawke in the vessel."

"Never fear," I replied. "I don't know if the *Strathmore* calls for passengers at Plymouth; the *Portia* always did. But anyhow, if Plymouth is the last place she looks in to, and Miss Hawke and her aunt are not aboard, you may trust me to get Dan Thompson to put me ashore."

"Well, well, you know the ropes," said my uncle; "there's no use teaching you to suck eggs. Your feet are heavier than your head, and you'll always fall upon 'em, I calculate. I dare say my wife would think I have no right to take the interest I feel in this new move of yours. It's not neighbourly. As a father myself I oughtn't to show a youngster like you any sympathy in this job of dishing a parent's hopes and foisting a son-in-law he objects to upon him. But I can't help remembering, Jack, that you are my brother Tom's son, and I can't help feeling that the peremptory fashion in which that Australian squatter has warned you off, the insolent manner in which he has treated you, who are a gentleman and my nephew, and who has done him no other wrong than paying him the handsomest compliment a man can pay a father, I mean hugely admiring his daughter and loving her for herself only,

without a single arrier pony, as the French call it, respecting what she'll be worth in ducats ; I say I can't help resenting all this as a derned insult offered to the whole of us Seymours, living and dead, and therefore, my lad, my best hopes accompany you, and if you think any woman bearing the name of Hawke worthy of so honourable a title as that of Seymour, then I'm not a Christian if I don't devoutly wish that when you return you'll bring back Florence with you as your wife ; " and looking as if this apology for himself had considerably eased his mind, he shook hands with me, paid the bill, and we separated.

END OF VOL. I.

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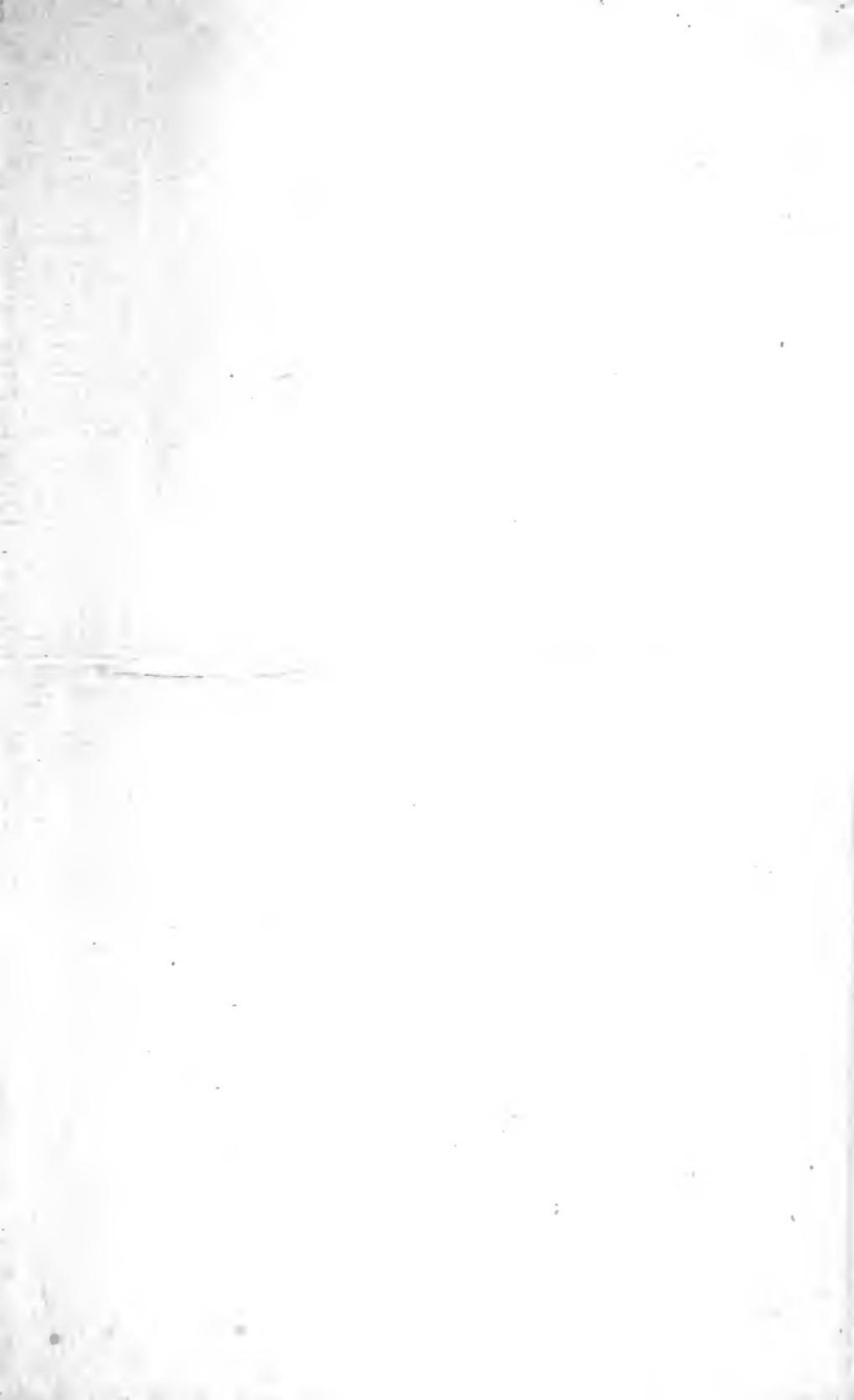
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